

INSPIRING HOPE

John Cole- "My heart success story starts at birth"

My heart success story starts at birth in 1965 (49 years ago)! I was born with a Ventricular Septal Defect (VSD), but it was not diagnosed for several months after birth. My first surgery was at 2 months of age for Pyloric Stenosis, followed within days with a hernia surgery. During these procedures, they noticed some issues and referred me to what was then Children's Hospital. So at 4 months, my first heart surgery was a Pulmonary Banding as a stop gap measure to get me through until I was big enough to undergo the full open-heart repair.

I had open-heart surgery for the VSD repair in 1973 at almost 8 years old. After the surgery I was not responding well when they turned down the external pacemaker. As a result I was left on the ventilator for over a week and the external pacemaker for 3 weeks until they implanted my first pacemaker. Apparently during surgery the HIS or Right Bundle Branch nerve that carries the AV node signal to the ventricles was severed leaving me with a total heart block. Between surgeries I also contracted pneumonia. There's nothing like turning you on your side with a ventilator tube, chest tube, and a recently cracked open chest to pound on your back to loosen all the crud in the lungs. Then suck it out through the ventilator tube. After six weeks I was finally released and can remember being so weak that I couldn't pick my feet up enough to step up on a curb.



The first pacemaker lasted almost a year. The second however started cutting out on me after two months and I had an emergency trip back to Children's in the middle of the night because I was passing out. Through the years I've had eleven pacemakers, two infections (one surgical and one from a damaged pocket), one collapsed lung, ten leads, and four different implant sites.

When I was in college my cardiologist at the time, Dr. Craenen, told me two things: (1) your heart is perfectly normal now, it just doesn't work by itself and (2) just keep coming to Children's. I've held true to #2, but in the last 10 years have come up with some Ventricular Tachycardia. I made it over twenty years without any medication, but started taking a beta blocker to calm down all the extra beats occurring. I've been told that eventually I will need an ICD because all the scar tissue on my heart has taken its toll. It's been 41 years since open heart and the first pacemaker and I'm more active now than ever. After I started going to a personal trainer a couple of years ago, I requested that the upper limit on the pacemaker be increased because I would occasionally hit the ceiling of 150 bpm. They actually agreed and upped to 170!

To date I've had 23 surgeries not all heart related, the last one being an incisional hernia repair in late 2012 of my open heart scar. I know that more surgeries will be coming; I just hope that they get farther in between as technology increases the battery life of the pacemakers. All in all I am blessed with the gift of life and fine doctors and hospital care!!

If you've had a similar experience, or would just like to talk to John about living with heart disease, his contact information is listed below!

Mended Hearts of Central Ohio

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