

INSPIRING HOPE

Staci James - *"I have no problems maintaining my home, going to work and taking care of my daughter..."*



My story with CHD (Congenital Heart Disease) began in 1975, when after my pediatrician heard a **murmur** she sought the advice of a colleague in Pediatric Cardiology.

At first the physician was not sure what was wrong. He knew I was not growing as children my age should, but I ate well and was meeting my milestones. An Echocardiogram at that time revealed a **defect of the mitral valve**. Surgery was eminent, but when to do it became the question.

I had many echocardiograms, a **heart catheterization at age 3**, and consultation with two surgeons (one who refused to operate and another who told my parents he knew exactly what was wrong and how to fix it).

In 1989, at age 13, I underwent surgery to repair a clefted mitral value and remove a sub-aortic membrane. I was told following surgery that I may never be able to have children and the length of time the repair would last was unknown.

I continued to enjoy school where I was able to participate in gym class, but no competitive sports. I did tire more easily than my peers, but knew my limits. I attended college and obtained a Bachelors of Science in Nursing. Upon graduation I secured employment in the Cardiac Intensive Care Unit at the now Nationwide Children's Hospital. In December of 2011 I graduated with my Master's in Nursing and work full time as a Family Nurse Practitioner at University Medical Associates in Athens, Ohio.

Since 1989 I have had 2 more surgeries. In 2003 the valves were both repaired again, and then under the care of a trained ACHD (Adult Congenital Heart Disease) physician and a high risk Obstetrician, who had extensive knowledge of CHD, I delivered Ashleigh. The valves did not tolerate the pregnancy and in 2005 I underwent **double tissue valve replacement** and then developed heart rhythm abnormalities and a pacemaker was implanted.

I currently follow up with the ACHD physician on a yearly basis and have my pacemaker checked every 6 months to determine if it is keeping my heart in rhythm and the battery life is efficient. *I have no problems maintaining my home, going to work, and taking care of my daughter*; however I do recognize that I cannot operate at maximum for more than three days at a time without taking a day to rest and relax.

I find pacing myself to accomplish tasks that require great amounts of energy or stair climbing works best. I will need more surgery in the future as the average life of tissue valves is 10-20 years and the average battery life of a pacemaker is 5-12 years.

Thank you for taking time to read my story!

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

Mended Hearts of Central Ohio

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It is great to be alive – and to help others