



*“Don’t leave your AF until it is too late. Do something about it.”*

**Paul Jaworski**

**Paul Jaworski survived an AF-related stroke after being diagnosed with Paroxysmal AF in January 2012.**

**Here the 57-year-old father-of-two and retired policeman shares his story – from first being aware of his atrial fibrillation, to being diagnosed and surviving an AF-related stroke. He also shares his advice on learning to live with AF.**

When I look back I knew I had AF for years but because it came and went I didn’t think it was a problem and it was something I just learned to live with.

I basically diagnosed myself from searching the symptoms on the internet and I started to take an aspirin every day because I found out about the risk of stroke associated with the disorder.

I would get a racing heart and then as time went on I could feel it was irregular. But I would sit down and it would go away. It never really became a complete nuisance for me and it was very intermittent. I was probably having something like six attacks a year.

I find it hard to describe but it was a very strange sensation when I did have an episode – a bit like there being a hamster inside your chest. I read all about triggers and I tried to work out what mine were but it was almost impossible. Too much alcohol, too much MSG, being too cold or even swimming - I think at some point I’ve considered everything to have brought my AF on! Ultimately I think there are a lot of triggers and it is almost impossible to narrow it down.



It wasn't until January 2012 things started to get much worse. The episodes were becoming more frequent and AF was having a bigger impact on my life. I was getting really ticked off with it.

One really cold night I went to take the rubbish out and I was aware I was getting out of breath to the point where I was actually finding it very hard to breathe. I had really intense pain in my back and shoulders and just didn't feel right at all.

By the morning my heart had returned to normal rhythm but my wife and I decided it was time to get it checked out. By complete coincidence I went back into AF while I was in the waiting room at the doctor surgery. I was taken to hospital where I was finally officially diagnosed with AF. I was given medication and went home.

The AF wouldn't go away and I started a period where it just drove me crazy. My episodes were becoming more and more regular. I'd have one and it would go away but then a couple of days later I'd have another.

It came to a head when I went on a cruise and it really kicked up and I felt awful. I spent most of my time laid on my bed feeling terrible. When I got back I went to see a cardiologist but nothing else showed up and it was the same story. Before then my AF had always gone away within 8 hours but not long after this I had an episode which didn't. I went to A&E and I was sent home with flecainide but this didn't work and my AF came back again.



In September 2012 things really came to a head. I had been to the gym and I was in the changing room and went into AF and felt really rough. I managed to drive home and went to bed but when I woke up the next morning I was still in AF. Eventually my heart went back into sinus rhythm.

That night I was on my computer when suddenly I started getting all the symptoms of a stroke. It felt like sparks were going off in my head and then the whole right side of my body went numb and my speech went. I got downstairs and my wife knew something was wrong immediately and called an ambulance.

I had suffered a mini-stroke. I was taken to hospital but I was very lucky because by the time I had got there I had already started to recover.



Knowing the risk of stroke associated with AF and how strokes are often more debilitating I do feel very lucky and it still haunts me to this day.

I have since been put on the anticoagulant dabigatran and a higher dosage of flecainide and my episodes are a lot less frequent. But AF still has an impact on my life - psychologically it is a significant weight on your mind and you are constantly aware of it.

I have a consultation early next year regarding ablation and I am considering that as my next step.

Living with AF is very difficult and here have been times when I have been particularly bad when I couldn't sleep and I have cried because I just felt so alone.

But I'm determined not to let it beat me or stop me in any way. I am keeping fit – in fact I have lost 8 stone since I first started to get my symptoms and I am still in the gym all the time.

My advice to anyone experiencing a similar situation to mine is - don't feel alone. There are so many other people out there with this. At first it can seem like nobody can give you any information about AF. But ask the AF Association for literature and advice. I have found their support absolutely fantastic. It was so great to have a voice on the end of the telephone – someone to help me who knew all about the disorder and the treatments available. The support is there.

Also if you think you have AF push it with your doctors. Looking back I wish that is what I had done and I had got it seen too before I did and pushed to see a cardiologist. Really I knew what was wrong with me. So don't leave it until it is too late - do something about it.

**Paul Jaworski**