

## Maureen, March 2014

I've had a heart problem ever since 1948, when I was just 11 years old. Around that time, I contracted rheumatic fever, a condition that is very rare now. In fact, I believe most people who contracted the infection as a child are probably no longer with us. As a result of the rheumatic fever, I developed mitral stenosis, a narrowing of the mitral valve in my heart. Because of this, it's hard to know exactly when my atrial fibrillation started. I have lived with heart problems for most of my life.

When I was in my forties, I was put on a drug called warfarin to prevent my blood from clotting (this is a risk with irregular heart rhythm). Unfortunately, when I needed a knee replacement operation eight years ago I had to stop taking it, which caused a stroke. I eventually recovered from the stroke but am still weak on my left side so I use a crutch in my right hand. I've never let things stop me though; I've always lived a full and active life.



That said, over the last 10 years in particular, I have really struggled with my breathing. It got to the point that I knew I had to have some serious consultations.

I saw a specialist who initially suggested that I have a balloon inserted into the valve in my heart to open it up, but it didn't help enough.

With my breathing difficulties persisting, six years ago, I was eventually diagnosed with atrial fibrillation and put on digoxin, which strengthens and slows down the heartbeat.

For a couple of years a treatment routine of 120mg of digoxin was fine. However more recently my heart rate has slowed down even more. My dose was reduced to 65mg to try and create a balance, but that just made me feel much worse; I had no energy, I would wake up in the night with a start and palpitations. During the day I felt giddy, it was very hard for me.

In 2013 my doctor asked me to consider having a pacemaker fitted. I wore a heart monitor for a week to see the patterns and disruptions to my heartbeat and establish whether the pacemaker could help. Over that week, in July 2013, the monitor recorded 41 heartbeat pauses. Alarmingly, 30 of them were over two and a half seconds long, and the longest ones during the night were four and a half seconds. If a pause of that length occurred during the day, the consultants were worried I could potentially collapse.

So I started 2014 on the waiting list for a conventional pacemaker. The surgeon who was installing the first leadless pacemaker in the UK, a Nanostim, called me and asked if I would consider receiving it. Seeing as I just couldn't wait to have a pacemaker, I jumped at the chance. Plus, the new pacemaker wouldn't leave a scar or lump on my chest. I wasn't looking forward to having the surgical pocket on the chest, where a normal pacemaker sits. I worried I might turn over onto it in my sleep.

The Nanostim pacemaker was fitted in January 2014 and the whole procedure only took seven minutes! I didn't actually even realise it had been put in, I thought I was still waiting for the anaesthetic to start working when I was told the procedure was finished. Since then I've been sleeping very comfortably. I'm still having check ups at the pacemaker clinic but hopefully I can forget that it's there completely in time.

It has made a difference to my life already. For example, after a recent pacing clinic appointment, my husband and I passed Westfield shopping centre in Stratford and decided to grab lunch. You have to remember I have a stick and was also pushing a walking frame. In the past, if I had walked through the shopping centre, I would have had to stop. I'd be sweating and out of breath. I used to become out of breath at even very mild inclines, the kinds most people wouldn't even notice. This time, I walked through the shopping centre without stopping and we went for lunch at Jamie's restaurant. I was still tired, but nothing like the fatigue before my pacemaker was fitted.

Since I've had a pacemaker fitted it's also helped me mentally, as I know it will kick in if it's needed. I also haven't had a giddy spell since, which is wonderful. I have a few more appointments at the pacing clinic and as it's a new device I will be going in a bit more often, but that's fine by me.

I have lots to look forward too as well. I'm really looking forward to getting out in the garden and ordering my husband Rod about to help keep it looking pretty. Also, my granddaughter plays for Arsenal and England under 17's, so I'd love to go and see a match. Having a pacemaker has brought some pleasant surprises too. As this was the first leadless pacemaker to be implanted in the UK I've been on the news and even the Alan Titchmarsh show, my family has loved seeing me on the telly!