

Young and active with AF – Jason’s updated story



I was diagnosed with atrial fibrillation in November 2012, aged 41. I have always been very active since I was 8 years old. I was still playing football at the time of diagnosis among other active pastimes including swimming, boxing and general weight training.

It was while I was training with a friend who is a personal trainer that I first thought I had an issue. The training sessions were hard and I started to develop dizzy spells. I put this down to being 41 and not being as fit as I had been in the past, or maybe I had a virus. The dizzy spells only materialised when I was doing cardiovascular training; I was fine with weight training.

This continued for about three weeks, so I decided to see my GP. He checked my blood pressure which was fine, but on checking my pulse he noticed it was rapid and weak. I had an ECG and he spotted the AF. I was lucky in the respect that my

GP could detect AF. He arranged for a blood test and informed me he would make an appointment for me with a Consultant Cardiologist.

My good fortune ran out there. A few days later I had a call from my GP suggesting I go to A&E with a letter from him stating I was to be admitted with a view to see a heart specialist. I was a little scared as I still didn't know what AF was and not having any previous medical conditions. I was admitted to the Medical Assessment Unit. After sitting around for five hours I was discharged and told to go back to my GP and make arrangements to go to a warfarin clinic.

I did just that, but couldn't see the same GP. I saw another GP who instructed me I was fine and that he had AF and just took an aspirin when he had an attack. I was confused and didn't know who to believe. One GP admitted me to hospital and the other dismissed me with aspirin.

“I was lucky in the respect that my GP could detect AF.”

I foolishly believed the second GP's opinion and tried to return to my life as normal, but once I resumed training I was again experiencing the dizzy spells. I decided to go through my private medical scheme at work and was referred to a consultant cardiologist. He confirmed my AF and placed me on warfarin and amiodarone.

A week later I returned for a heart scan and was informed my heart was healthy and the tablets had taken me out of AF. The consultant took me off warfarin and instructed me to reduce the amiodarone over the next couple of months. He also instructed me to take "baby aspirin" 75MG.

“Joining the AFA HealthUnlocked forum has been a big help to me”

That was approximately 18 months ago and since then quite a lot has happened. The amiodarone worked well, but I was aware of the side effects and in April 2014 I was admitted to hospital for a flecainide trial. Hospital admittance is procedure, as they monitor the heart after the initial dosage. All went well and I was happy not to be taking amiodarone anymore!

Initially, things went well with flecainide. However, after two months of bliss I had my first attack in six months.

The episodes continued every week for three months. My medication was changed several times, but the episodes are still present. To make matters worse, I started to lose quite a lot of weight. Initially I thought this was because I was watching what I ate and drank, but the weight kept coming off me. After a routine blood test with my GP, they found I had developed an overactive thyroid, one of the side effects of amiodarone.

I'm currently being treated for both AF and thyroid issues. I have been referred for an ablation, but have yet to see an EP. Hopefully this will not take too long and will be a success as, at the moment, I am unable to enjoy my many pastimes as the majority involve some form of physical activity.

Joining the AFA HealthUnlocked forum has been a big help to me, as there are so many fellow AF sufferers being put through the mill. Reading their good news stories tends to give me hope.

I'm staying positive and hopefully in a few months' time I will be able to report that my life is back on track.

Jason Thornton, West Yorkshire (2014)