

Martha's story

When her fainting spells began at age 30, Martha Bryce accepted them as a normal part of her life. As a nurse, Martha drew logical conclusions about what could be causing her fainting based on what she saw in her patients - blood sugar, dehydration, epilepsy - and quickly adopted techniques to hide them from the people around her. "If I was in a lunch meeting with colleagues, I would pretend to be looking in my purse for something so that I could put my head in a down position and regain control without people noticing," Martha describes. It wasn't until she had a son that her anxiety about repeated fainting episodes was



great enough for her to take action. Though symptoms stopped while Martha was pregnant, she was very concerned when they resurfaced after her son was born. It was only after she had an episode whilst alone with her infant that Martha began seriously looking into a diagnosis for her unexplained fainting.

Five years after her first episode, Martha finally had an answer, but it wasn't what she expected. Like many other people who faint, Martha initially thought a neurologist would be able to solve the mystery, but then learned that there could be a link between the fainting and her heart. Martha discovered the support of STARS (Syncope Trust and Reflex Anoxic Seizures), non-profit organization, as she was looking into the issue and was motivated to consult an electrophysiologist (heart rhythm specialist). The heart rhythm specialist placed her on a heart rhythm monitor, which recorded her heart beat and allowed the doctors to determine that an abnormal heart beat - known as an arrhythmia, was causing Martha's fainting spells.

Martha was initially treated with beta blockers to correct her arrhythmia. When those were not effective, she was then fitted with a pacemaker and has not experienced another syncope episode. Thanks to an accurate diagnosis and effective treatment of her syncope, Martha has had peace of mind for more than eight years. "Knowing that I would not have another fainting spell gave me confidence that I could be alone with my son. When the syncope episode first took that from me, I didn't know how I was going to cope," Martha says. Her experiences with syncope have given her a new perspective on the seriousness of fainting. "I think the public views fainting through a Hollywood lens, as something that happens to women and is a sign of weakness. It's dangerous to dismiss fainting when there are people like me whose fainting signaled an underlying heart condition."