

## ***Debbie's story***

When cardiac nurse Debbie Lee experienced her first fainting episode at age 56, she intuitively contributed the unexplained fainting to a heart condition. However, accepting that she had a serious health issue was easier said than done. Though she had three or more episodes a day, Debbie spent the first several months avoiding the issue. After realizing she needed to take action to get better, she spent the following three months working with a cardiologist to diagnosis her condition through various tests. Ultimately, it took an implanted cardiac monitor (ICM) to discover that a serious heart arrhythmia (an irregular heart rhythm) was causing her fainting episodes. Unfortunately for Debbie, her diagnosis was followed by additional issues.



Debbie's life was turned upside down with the onset of her fainting episodes. Her cardiologist prescribed beta blockers, antiarrhythmic drugs and then finally a cardiac catheter ablation procedure in attempt to eliminate the fainting episodes and other side effects of her arrhythmia. It took two cardiac ablation procedures before Debbie experienced an arrhythmia-free year. However, her remission proved to be temporary and the arrhythmia returned. Once again, Debbie dealt with daily fainting episodes. Her third ablation provided only four months of relief from arrhythmias and fainting.

Debbie describes the peace of mind she felt during the timeframe she was free from arrhythmias and fainting as a whole new appreciation for living. "I was like myself again, full of life, energy and enthusiasm. It was so wonderful to live life to the fullest, without the worry of passing out." The impact of Debbie's fainting extends to her husband, son and extended network of family and friends. "There is always concern and apprehension as to when and where the next episode will occur. My husband is frequently checking on me, and will sometimes wake me up during the night to make sure I am still alive," Debbie says.

In addition to emotional distress, Debbie's fainting episodes add significant limitations to her daily life. For safety reasons, Debbie does not drive in case she experiences a fainting episode on the road. "Before my diagnosis, I never realized how difficult it is to be dependent on someone else for transportation." Debbie is also unable to pursue some activities she once loved, such as ballet.

Through her career as a cardiac nurse and her personal experiences with fainting, Debbie understands the importance of taking fainting to heart and exploring serious cardiac issues as possible underlying causes. She urges others to respond quickly to any episodes of unexplained fainting, rule out simple causes first and seek further testing to determine if there is a serious health issue at hand.