

# Activity 1.1 Mark's and Peter's stories

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## Purpose

- To provide an overview of some symptoms and treatments of cardiovascular disease using personal accounts.
- To provide an introduction to the topic.
- To practise extracting relevant information when reading text.

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## Procedure

The two passages below are Mark's and Peter's own accounts of their experiences with cardiovascular disease. As you read each account, note down relevant information about:

- a symptoms
- b diagnostic tests
- c treatments
- d any features of each person's lifestyle that you think might have contributed to their development of the disease.

When identifying information in this way, try and be selective and concise in the notes you make.

## Mark's story

### By Mark Tolley

I'm 21 now, but 6 years ago something momentous happened that changed my life.

On 28th July 1995, I was sitting in my bedroom playing on my computer when I started to feel dizzy with a slight headache. Standing, I lost all balance and was feeling very poorly. I think I can remember trying to get downstairs and into the kitchen before fainting. People say that unconscious people can still hear. I don't know if it's true but I can remember my Dad phoning for a doctor and that was it. It took five minutes from me being an average 15-year-old to being in a coma.

I was rushed to Redditch Alexandra Hospital where they did some reaction tests on me. They asked my parents questions about my lifestyle (did I smoke, take drugs, etc.?). Failing to respond to any stimulus, I was transferred in an ambulance to Coventry Walsgrave Neurological Ward. Following CT and MRI scans on my brain it was concluded that I had suffered a bleed on my brain. My parents signed the consent form for me to have an operation lasting many hours. I was given about a 30% chance of survival.

They stopped the bleed by clipping the blood vessels that had burst with metal clips, removing the excess blood with a vacuum. I was then transferred to the intensive care unit to see if I would recover. Within a couple of days I was conscious and day by day regained my sight, hearing and movement (although walking and speech was still distorted). They had shaved all my hair off!

I had a remarkably quick recovery considering the severity of the operation. I was talking again (although slurred and jumbled) within 5 days. By the end of the week, I was transferred back to Redditch Alexandra Hospital to continue the rest of my recovery.

There I received occupational therapy, physiotherapy, and speech and language therapy to improve my co-ordination, speech and strength. Within 7 days I could walk aided and talk better – I was then discharged to complete my recovery at home. I was given a wheelchair and was admitted for therapy as an outpatient. The occupational therapy trained my ability to perform everyday tasks. They made me make tea, do jigsaws, etc. to improve my cognitive skills.

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Another effect that the haemorrhage had on me was that the whole right-hand side of my body was weakened (the haemorrhage happened on the left side of my brain) and things that I took for granted before became a challenge. My left hand compensated for the weakness and gradually I became stronger, albeit on my former weaker side!

Three weeks later I returned to Coventry Walsgrave for an angiogram, where an X-ray dye was injected into my veins which showed up my blood vessels on a scan. However, this showed that there was still a bleed occurring and so I was prepared for surgery once again.

The operation was lengthy, but not an emergency. However, I was still warned of the dangers of such surgery. The operation did not leave me with much disability this time, and I woke up within a day of being transferred back into the intensive care unit again. Speech and movement were regained quickly. I was discharged to outpatients within 3 weeks, after undergoing another angiogram, and MRI and CT scans on my brain. Embarrassingly, they had shaved only *half* of my hair off this time!

The following Wednesday I was called back to the Coventry & Warwick Hospital where my neurosurgeon held a clinic. He said that there was still a small bleed that needed to be clipped. So I was transferred to Walsgrave for my third operation. This one not being as severe, I woke up minutes after the operation was completed with my faculties fully intact. I could talk and walk aided. Following more scans, the next week I was discharged again to complete my recovery at home. This was now late October 1995. Things such as stair climbing became easier and I no longer required my wheelchair.

I have had no further episodes of brain haemorrhage activity apart from occasional headaches. I am on anti-convulsant tablets (phenytoin) as I am now at a much higher risk from epileptic seizures because of the surgery (although I have not had a fit since the operations). I completed physiotherapy in around November 1995, by doing exercises that improved my stamina, motor skills and co-ordination.

Although I have never been told a full reason why I suffered my stroke, I am certain that it was due to being born with weak blood vessels in my brain that gave way after years of increasing pressure. I'm glad I was at home when it happened; I could have been swimming or walking in the countryside with nobody around!

Returning to school in November, I found reading, writing and walking a challenge. I was treated differently from other students, which I found difficult as I wanted to fit back into my normal routine.

I passed my GCSE exams with lots of effort and went on to the 6th Form. I did a 1-year course in Health and Social Care which aided my recovery and gave me the strength and confidence to go to college to further my education. The course also showed me how to express myself in a way that would make everyone look beyond my disabilities.

I recovered the most in the first 2 years following the stroke, now it has been a gradual improvement. I do sport and go dancing and play music like normal people my age. My memory is back to normal, only faltering occasionally. Nobody knows about my stroke unless they question the huge scar on my head, so I must have recovered pretty well!

I found online organisations such as 'Different Strokes' helpful because I met some people who were in the same boat as me. It really helps to share experiences.

Well that's my story. I go trekking around the world in 10 weeks time. I don't know what the future has in store for me; I don't really want to know either. I just look forward to it with hope.

Thank you for reading this.

Mark xx

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### Peter's story

#### By Peter Kempson

I remember clearly the first time I held a hockey stick at school; football wasn't on the sports programme, so it became hockey, rugby and cricket in each of the terms.

During my time at the school I developed a keen interest in all sports, representing the school in hockey and athletics. It did not distract me from my school work but seemed to make me more attentive and kept my mind more active.

After leaving school I still maintained my sporting interest, representing Bedfordshire at hockey and taking part in the athletics team at my place of work.

In 1961, aged 23, I got the first indication of cardiovascular problems. I was told that I had high blood pressure. I didn't really take much notice. Well you don't think much about that at 23, do you? My father had died at the age of 53 from a heart attack but as he was about 4 stone overweight, had a passion for fatty foods and smoked 60 full strength cigarettes a day, I didn't compare his condition to mine.

Throughout the rest of my working life I continued to play sport, mainly hockey, and was never overweight. I must admit that I probably drank too much at times and didn't bother too much about calories and cholesterol in food.

As I got older I found it more difficult to keep fit during the summer break between the hockey seasons and so reverted to road running. I ran my first marathon in Leeds at the age of 42 and I subsequently did another five, including two in London.

All was going well I thought, until having a medical for a new job showed my blood pressure reading to be 240 over 140. The doctor could not believe that I was still walking around, let alone running, and sent me straight to my G.P. Since then I have taken tablets for blood pressure and have also reviewed my dietary intake.

I did continue running and completed the Great North Run at the age of 63. A few months later and thinking about doing the Great North Run again, I was running 8 miles a week and playing hockey, when my 8 day holiday in Ireland became 3 days touring and 12 days in hospital.

At 2 o'clock in the morning of May 8th I woke up with a terrific pain in my chest. I was sweating profusely and looking very pale. My wife rang the hotel reception and within 10 minutes a doctor had arrived, checked me over, and pronounced that I had had a heart attack. Within an hour I was in intensive care and being closely monitored. At 5 am I had a second attack and a specialist inserted a temporary pacemaker to keep my heart rate up as it was dropping below 40.

After 5 days in intensive care I was transferred to the general ward for recuperation. I gradually increased my walks each day and was watched by the Lifestyle Nurse while I climbed stairs. The nurse also discussed my lifestyle. Did I smoke? No. Did I eat fatty foods? Yes. Did I exercise? Yes. Was I overweight? No. Did I have a history of cardiac problems in my family? Yes! This then appeared to be the possible cause. I was told that it was possible that had I not looked after myself I might have had a heart attack much earlier in life.

After 10 days I was given a stress test which involved running on a treadmill to determine my ability to cope with normal life. Having passed the test I was brought home by the travel insurance company, escorted by a doctor.

On returning to Huddersfield I eventually had an angiogram and was told that I needed a triple bypass operation, but that my heart might not be strong enough to take it. The specialist at Leeds General, Mr McGoldrick, gave me a detailed analysis of the situation and the operation, but the final decision was up to me.

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I found it very difficult to walk more than 100 yards without using my Nitro-spray. This was very difficult to cope with considering that 9 months earlier I had been so active. The decision was easy, I would have the operation.

I have to say it was not pleasant, but I had decided that it was necessary and I would cope with anything that happened if it would get me back to a decent lifestyle. Well the operation, a quadruple bypass, was a success and after 8 days I was back home.

Recuperation involved plenty of walking and visits to the Cardiac Rehab. At that time I was introduced to Heartline, which is a group of people who have suffered cardiac problems, encouraging exercise and recuperation by being able to talk to others with similar experiences. I go swimming once a week and have increased my distance from 2 lengths at first to 40 lengths after 12 weeks. Although I feel fit enough to resume running I think I will put it on hold for a while. I don't think I will ever play hockey again. There again, at 66 that's probably not a bad decision!

Peter Kempson