

## **I had AV Nodal Re-entrant Tachycardia but after Catheter Ablation I am enjoying life to the full... Caroline's story...**



### **When it started**

When I was about 14, I used to play hockey and have 'funny turns' when I was sprinting. The teachers and my friends always used to say 'Caroline's having one of her episodes again' and it just became a part of my life. I visited the hospital when it started to happen more frequently and I had an ECG, which they then dismissed saying nothing was wrong because my heart seemed to be healthy and beating regularly. My episodes tended to last about 4-5 minutes when I would get extremely fast heartbeats, pressure on my chest, ringing in my ears and a sort of fuzzy vision. I went through my teenage years, thinking it was normal and that I was just unfit, plus it only tended to happen once every 2 weeks, and during the school

holidays it didn't happen at all as I wasn't playing hockey and netball.

Throughout university I don't think it happened at all so I completely forgot about my dizzy spells, until I took up netball again after finishing when I was 21. The episodes started happening again, but very infrequently; still only for 4-5 minutes at a time and when they did, I would crouch down, have a sip of water (as I kept some at the side of the court) and waited for them to go away. I started to eat a banana before I went on court, take energy drinks and sweets, thinking it was something to do with my blood sugar but nothing seemed to work.

My team mates and family didn't really seem to take me seriously, thinking that I was unfit and my heart was just beating fast; until it happened during a training session and I was able to get some of my team mates to feel my pulse; one of whom was a nurse, and all said that the beats were not normal!

### **My turning point**

I was still only having short spells of the palpitations until I joined a gym and went swimming. It was the first bit of vigorous exercise I had done after being on honeymoon for 3 weeks, when, while I was having a shower, I had one of my episodes. I tried to work through it because I wanted to finish in the shower, then sit down and relax, but I passed out and cut my knee open on the metal drain cover. I was taken to hospital in an ambulance because I ended up passing out twice and hitting my head on the floor. I explained to the doctor in the hospital about my palpitations and he wrote a referral to my doctor about being taken seriously and needing to be seen. I was then passed from pillar to post from my GP, to a doctor in the hospital, then to two other doctors, until a consultant from Leicester saw me who was a specialist in arrhythmias. He gave me an ultrasound, more ECGs and a treadmill stress test which all showed that my heart was healthy. I kept specifying that it only

seemed to happen when I was playing netball so was there any way they could test me when I am playing - which would be the best way to catch it. The consultant then booked me in for a 72 hour holter monitor to be fitted just before my match so they could test my palpitations. It didn't happen every time I played netball, so I was a bit nervous just in case it didn't come on. Luckily it did; at 1.44pm, 44 minutes into the game, my palpitations started and lasted 4 minutes.

### **The process**

It took about 2 months to get another appointment and by this time I thought I was ok as I hadn't heard anything back from the hospital. However, after my appointment, the consultant explained to me how my beats during this period were getting up to 245bpm and as quickly as it came on, it went away. He told me I either had Supraventricular Tachycardia (SVT) or Ventricular Tachycardia (VT) and he explained that Catheter Ablation may be necessary to eliminate the palpitations. However, before this procedure, I would need the explorative surgery to see exactly where the palpitations are coming from. In the meantime he prescribed me Atenolol Betablockers which I decided not to take, but decided to stop playing netball instead!

This was back in December 2008 and I was eventually booked in for surgery on 28<sup>th</sup> April 2009 at the Glenfield Hospital in Leicester. During this time, I had stopped playing netball but I had been going to the gym four times a week and in these months, it only happened once in the gym.

### **The operation**

I went for my pre admission surgery where I had yet another ECG, heart x-ray and other routine tests, when the nurse explained the procedure and the risks to me. I had done a lot of research on the internet about the procedure and about both SVT and VT. I had read all of the case studies on the Arrhythmia Alliance website which I found both useful and slightly scary!

I was taken into hospital at 10.30am in the morning having fasted since the evening, I had a intravenous needle placed into my arm and was all ready to go. I didn't get into surgery, however, until 3pm. I was taken into the operating theatre, fluids were connected to my needle, drapes were placed over my groin area and I had ECG pads placed on me. My groin area had a local anaesthetic and I was given something to make me drowsy. Three catheter wires were placed through a hole in my groin and there was an x-ray screen where you could see these being inserted. The first half of my procedure was fine, they were making my heart have one of its episodes and although this was unpleasant, it didn't hurt. They were then able to find the part of my heart which triggered these episodes, and ablate it. There seemed to be sweeping movements where they burned the tissue away. This was unpleasant. There was a lot of pressure on the groin and when it was being ablated, it felt like severe heartburn and pressure in your chest. Luckily the whole procedure only took 2.5 hours- whereas in my pre admission clinic they said it could last up to 5 hours!

I was then taken back to the ward where I was able to have a drink and something to eat and had to apply pressure to my groin for 20 minutes. After 2 hours I was able to get up, but when I did, my groin wound opened and I started to bleed, therefore had to go back to bed rest for another 2 hours. I then (stupidly) decided that I didn't want to use the bed pan so didn't have a lot to drink, therefore when I got up after these next 2 hours, I passed out and had to have a drip for 4 hours (my own fault). I eventually left hospital that night at midnight.

## **After the operation**

I had the next 3 days off work, I was stiff, my groin was sore, but my heart seemed fine. I started driving that weekend started, walking the dog and getting back to normal. By now, I had developed a small lump on my groin which I went to my doctors about and he assured me it would go down (which it did) and also the bruising started to go away too (I though 4 weeks later the bruise was still there but very feint). I also became aware of ectopic heart beats which worried me at first, but more research on the internet said that these were relatively normal. I still went to my doctors though for reassurance and he said they would take up to 4 months to calm down as it is the heart repairing itself. I started going back in the gym 2 weeks after my operation and everything seemed ok; no palpitations (touch wood)! I also had a follow up cardio MRI scan. My condition was called AV Nodal Re-entrant Tachycardia which is the most common form of SVT.

The reason I submitted my case study on this site is that I found it to be a great resource when I was researching my condition. I am only 26 years old, young for a heart condition, and I wanted to reassure people that it is ok and I am now enjoying my normal activities with no worries!

Caroline  
July 2009