



Life After a Heart Attack

After a quadruple bypass at age 55, Mike Philpott has slowed life down and encourages other heart attack survivors recovering from surgery.

By Michele G. Hudson

Heart attacks are not prejudiced. They can strike anyone, at any age, male or female, without concern for race or economic status. Even the devoted athlete and dedicated dieter are not immune to the risk of cardiovascular disease. Heart attacks rank as the No. 1 killer of men and women, with strokes being No. 3. But the good news is that more and more lives are saved each year because of individuals' quick re-

sponse in seeking emergency medical treatment.

"Knowing and paying attention to warning signs is a key to surviving a heart attack or stroke," according to **Nancy Gay**, spokesperson from the American Heart Association's Central Florida Chapter.

In August 2001, 62-year-old **Heathrow** resident **Mike Philpott** and his wife **Toni Philpott** were having lunch when he began perspiring and feeling nauseated. "My wife did two very smart things,"

says Mike. "She gave me two aspirin and told me to chew them up. I laid down on a couch in the back of the sandwich shop, but things did not improve. So within five minutes, my wife did the next smart thing: she called 911."

A Surprising Diagnosis

Mike, then 55, did not have pain but experienced heaviness in his chest. Paramedics rushed him to Winter Park Hospital where an EKG and sonogram turned up normal. "A



(left) Mike Philpott is grateful for the help of his wife, Toni, who called 911 when he had a heart attack seven years ago. (above) Now Mike enjoys a slower pace with his family, including his eighth grandchild, born in August, Jillian.

third blood sample showed sky-high enzyme levels, and they said, 'you had a heart attack!' I felt like the healthiest person in ICU. Little did I know, at that point, my heart was all clogged up," he recalls.

Transferred to Florida Hospital Orlando, Mike had a heart catheterization test, which showed four blocked coronary arteries. The next evening, he underwent quadruple bypass surgery.

"We were surprised by the condition of my arteries," Mike says. "I had a couple of warning episodes I ignored—like getting dizzy and out of breath—but didn't attribute that to anything serious. I wasn't as attuned to my body at that point."

A retired executive from GE Capital and Universal American Financial Corp., Mike's retirement was less than leisurely. At the time of his heart attack, he was working 12 to 14 hours a day, six days a week, in a nonprofit organization he and his wife managed. "I exercised sporadically and watched my diet half-heartedly. I knew I should limit my fats and calories, but my heart wasn't in it. I considered myself in pretty good shape for a man my age," he explains.

Slowing Life Down

How has his life changed since then? "Everything is slowed down

a bit now," Mike says. "Within 18 months, we got out of the non-profit. I started paying more attention to myself, the world and people around me, my family.

"It was a real eye-opener, and I realized that all of this could be taken away," Mike adds. "I now work out religiously, doing 60 minutes of cardiovascular exercise and 60 minutes of weight training three times a week, as well as eat a low-fat, low-calorie diet."

Mike and Toni, who is a mortgage broker, both volunteer at Florida Hospital in the Mended Hearts program, a support group for cardiac patients and their families. "You see just as many women as men and all ages," Mike says. "Someone visited me, and I know firsthand how important it is to encourage others."

He says it is normal to feel "down in the dumps" after surgery, but patients should know that time will heal their emotions just as it heals their physical wounds. Mike's advice: "Be aware of your own body and your health—don't take it for granted. Diet and exercise are very important. Get your heart rate up to optimal range for 30 minutes to

an hour, a minimum of three times a week."

The American Heart Association offers numerous programs to boost your knowledge of heart health. Gay emphasizes that, in addition to calling 911 if symptoms strike, knowing your risk factors and taking preventative measures are important. Learn more at AmericanHeart.org.

Heart Health Myths

Myth: If I exercise, I won't get heart disease.

Fact: Exercise is a great way to keep your heart healthy, but diet, genetics, ethnicity and smoking play a big role in heart disease.

Myth: Women are more likely to die of breast cancer.

Fact: One in 30 women dies of breast cancer; about one in every two women dies of heart disease or stroke.

Myth: There's nothing you can do to prevent a stroke.

Fact: You can reduce your risk by lowering your blood pressure, not smoking, getting regular check-ups and knowing the warning signs so you can get to the hospital immediately.

Myth: People always have warning signs leading up to a heart attack.

Fact: There was no evidence of the disease in 63 percent of women who died suddenly of coronary heart disease.

Myth: All foods labeled "trans fat free" are healthy.

Fact: Not true. Sweet rolls, even if made with healthier oils, may provide "empty calories" and, therefore, lack nutritional value.

Source: American Heart Association

Read about other local heart attack survivors on our Web site at CentralFlorida-Lifestyle.com.

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COURTESY OF MIKE PHILPOTT