

Jennifer's Story

Heart Attack Survivor
Jennifer Damon—Pittston, Maine

In January of 2006, Jennifer Damon was working the over-night shift at a rehab for women when she started feeling the “classic” symptoms of a heart attack. She was 31 years old and thought she was too young to be having a heart attack, so she ignored those first symptoms. As the night progressed, so did the symptoms. She noticed she was having difficulty breathing, nausea, pain in one of her shoulders, and her mouth was watering excessively. The first symptoms began at around 3 am, her shift ended at 8 am, and she went straight to the hospital.



When she arrived, she reported to the nurses in the emergency department that she was having a heart attack and told them her symptoms. They said to have a seat and they'd be with her. When the triage nurse called Jennifer in, she asked two questions: Why did she think she was having a heart attack and what had she done for drugs the previous night? She grabbed her arm and said, “I worked in a drug rehab all night and you're going to let me die if you don't do something now!” She was then rushed out back and treated. Later she was seen by a cardiologist who explained that her cardiac enzymes were off and that she would be transported to another hospital that specialized in the care she needed. She was released two days later, after being pumped with potassium. Her diagnosis was a cold in her heart muscle. She was advised to lose weight and change her diet, but nothing was mentioned about smoking.

A year later, she had a stent placed in her LAD (left anterior descending artery) after suffering another heart attack. The second time her symptoms presented so differently that she never suspected it. She had been having a pain in her right shoulder for several months. After receiving the stent, the cardiologist told her and her husband, in front of their 10-year-old twin daughters, “You know, if she would have quit smoking, she wouldn't have come back.”

When the family brought her home from the hospital that day, they all shared in destroying the tubes, tobacco, and the machine she used to roll her cigarettes. She remembers watching her daughters: one sprinkling tobacco around the yard, the other cutting up the tubes for the tobacco, and her husband shattering the rolling machine. It was clear that they didn't want her to smoke ever again. She smoked her last cigarette on January 6, 2007, because she knows the next one she smokes will kill her. She firmly believes in not letting heart disease control her life, but rather controlling her heart disease.

Today she strives to spread the word about women and heart health. She recently worked as an intern at Medical Care Development, for the Maine CDC's Cardiovascular Health Program. She feels that if we could teach every woman in Maine about heart health and how to prevent heart disease, it would be a huge success. "Take care of yourself and your heart. You deserve it! And if you recognize the symptoms of a heart attack, don't wait! Call 911 immediately. Emergency medical providers can begin testing and treatment as soon as they arrive, and get you to the hospital safer and faster!" To see more of Jennifer's story, visit this link: <http://www.maineheartiohealth.org/wisdomgained.html>.