

## SURVIVOR STORIES

### Margaret's Story

Heart Attack Survivor

Margaret Almeida - Maine

Margaret has had several bypasses, otherwise known as Coronary Artery Bypass Graft Surgery or CABG (five blockages, 90% blocked each). She says, "I didn't think I was having a heart attack. For two months I was having shortness of breath, which I blamed on everything except my heart." On the day she went to the hospital, she remembers having what she described as a "toothache" in her chest which she also blamed on something else. On this particular day though, the shortness of breath and chest "toothache" were worse.

Luckily for Margaret, her son and his wife made her go to the hospital. When she arrived, they told her she was having a heart attack. She said that she had experienced symptoms in her chest, but they came and went. About a month before her heart attack, Margaret reported these symptoms to her doctor and was sent for a stress test and an echocardiogram. She was told that there was a place at the bottom of her heart that wasn't getting enough blood and could be what was causing the shortness of breath. She chuckles and says, "that test didn't show up that I had clogged arteries."

The treatment that she has endeavored has been a positive life changing experience for her. Between the nurses and the doctors, Margaret couldn't ask for better treatment. "It has been excellent," she stated with enthusiasm. She was able to remain in her local area, which has been accessible both for her family and her physicians.

Aftercare has been an important factor for Margaret as well. She attends cardiac rehab; she is about one-third of the way through and reports that it is helping to pick up her stamina. Another piece of her aftercare is support from friends and family, which are abundant in Margaret's life. Her son is a huge component of her survival and recovery.

Margaret was surprised to learn that many people have heart attacks and don't even know it. They ignore the symptoms and convince themselves it is something else – just like Margaret did. Women don't always have the same symptoms as men, so they should be careful when something doesn't feel right.

Margaret believes that she could have died that day if her daughter-in-law hadn't insisted she go to the hospital. She feels lucky to be alive but wishes the test she had undergone would have noticed her blocked arteries. Today

Margaret tries to be active and eat a healthy well-balanced diet, which will help to lower her cholesterol and keep those arteries clean.

When asked if there was anything that she would have done different, Margaret answered by saying “I would have called an ambulance instead of waiting.”

The advise Margaret offers other women that may be at risk is to “pay attention to what your body is telling you, don’t think that it’s nothing when it may very well be something, especially when you get up there in age and you already have other risk factors.” As for being thankful, Margaret is very thankful for being alive. She says “I have many more years to be with my grandchildren, all 18 of them.”