

## Eric Ferguson Shares His Story



Most of us take for granted that our hearts are beating, doing what they're supposed to do. We rarely if ever notice our heart beats, and that's the way it's supposed to be. So when Eric Ferguson, on-air personality at The Mix in Chicago, started experiencing a pounding that felt like "a bomb going off" in his chest, he knew something was not right.

"I'd been feeling irregular and erratic beats occasionally for several years, but the symptoms weren't regular enough to be recreated when I went to the doctor," says Eric. "I even saw a cardiologist, but because I never had symptoms while at the doctor, he thought I was fine." So Eric just lived with the symptoms when they would arise, and tried not to worry about them.

### A Change of Heart

The strange sensation in his chest began to occur more frequently, and in January, 2010, it was so bad that Eric could feel every beat and could see his heart beating in his chest. One Friday in January, he'd had enough, so he booked an appointment with his primary care doctor, [Sheila Bhagavan, MD](#), an internist at Northwestern Memorial, for the following Monday afternoon. But as it turned out, he couldn't wait for the appointment.

"I felt horrible all weekend, and when I went to work on Monday, I realized I needed to see the doctor right away. So I called Dr. Bhagavan, and she told me to come in early. When I got to her office, she did an EKG." That's when things got hectic.

### Off to the Emergency Department

When Dr. Bhagavan saw the results of Eric's EKG, she immediately called the hospital's emergency department and told them she was bringing Eric in to be seen.

"When I got to the ER, they were ready for me and got me in right away. I went through a bunch of tests, but the doctors still couldn't pinpoint the reason for my heart rhythm irregularities, so they decided to keep me overnight so I could have a stress test in the morning."

### Catching the Rhythm

Eric's night was uneventful, and in the morning, they performed a stress test. He got on the treadmill and began to walk, and it wasn't long before his symptoms came back. "I felt a flutter right away, just like I had a million times. To me, this flutter was totally normal." So he was surprised when the tech brought in the cardiologist who, after looking at Eric's heart rhythm, seemed somber. They told him that he was experiencing ventricular tachycardia, which can lead to ventricular fibrillation and cardiac arrest. "They suggested I call my family and let them know what was going on," Eric said. "And I was surprised because I thought I was fine. I was 43 years old, I worked out regularly, and other than that heart flutter, I felt great."

## Test Results Bring on a Sigh of Relief

The next thing the doctors did was get Eric in for an angiogram, which is a test to check for blocked arteries in the heart and other cardiac abnormalities. His angiogram showed no signs of blockage. "The angiogram showed that the arteries in my heart were fine. In fact, the doctor said I had the arteries of a 25 year-old," Eric said.

Because the angiogram and other heart tests were normal, he was diagnosed with a primary heart rhythm disorder. Just a few fibers in his heart were causing his erratic heart rhythm, which is technically called idiopathic ventricular tachycardia. Although it causes uncomfortable symptoms that often cause patients significant distress, it is not usually life threatening because with idiopathic ventricular tachycardia the patient has a structurally healthy heart. It is also curable with a cardiac ablation in approximately 90 percent of cases. "And fortunately," Eric said, "my heart was healthy and the condition was totally curable. This was a huge relief because I went from thinking I was at risk of dying to knowing that I just needed an ablation."

## Fixing Eric's Heart

[Bradley P. Knight, MD](#), Director of Cardiac Electrophysiology at the [Bluhm Cardiovascular Institute of Northwestern Memorial](#), performed Eric's cardiac ablation. The first ablation went well and Eric felt better immediately. Unfortunately, he started having symptoms again while vacationing in Mexico a few weeks later. Because he'd been feeling so fantastic, Eric worked out hard, which is when his symptoms came back with a vengeance. "I called Dr. Knight right away to see if I needed to pack up and head back to Chicago immediately. But he assured me it wasn't necessary and suggested I finish my vacation without doing anything strenuous and see him when I got home."

The day he got back from Mexico, Eric visited with Dr. Knight who explained that ablations usually only have to be done once, but rarely, a second procedure is necessary to cauterize, or burn, the fibers that are causing the heart rhythm problems. He gave Eric a choice, telling him he could go through a second procedure right away, or he could try to manage his condition and symptoms with medication. Eric didn't hesitate and decided to move ahead and have a second procedure.

"If you'd have asked me a year ago whether I'd willingly undergo not one but two heart procedures, I'd have said no way. I'd never have thought I could handle it. I'm the guy who won't go to the doctor," Eric said. "But the entire procedure was much much easier than I'd anticipated, both physically and emotionally. Everyone at the hospital was great at providing information and describing what was going to happen. There was never a moment when I second guessed the care, which is huge for someone like me who is basically a baby when it comes to medical care."

Dr. Knight performed the second ablation the day after Eric got back from Mexico. He remembers the day because it was his wife's birthday, and the first procedure was done on his 43rd birthday.

## Getting His Life Back

Again, Eric felt better immediately after the procedure. “As soon as the anesthesia wore off, I could feel the difference.” He felt like he could jump back into his normal activities right away, but he took a week off just to play it safe and let his body recuperate. It’s been almost 11 months since his second ablation, and Eric hasn’t had any symptoms. “The procedure worked great – I haven’t had any after effects, I don’t have to take medication and I’m able to live my life just as I did before,” he said, “but I still check my pulse sometimes, just to see if anything’s going on.”

Fortunately, Eric’s heart is back to beating normally, and he’s back to doing the things he loves—like spending time with his family and playing golf and basketball. And, according to Dr. Knight, there’s no need for Eric to have follow-up appointments unless his symptoms come back.

## Eric’s Experience at Northwestern Memorial

Eric feels lucky to have received his care at Northwestern Memorial. “The care was tremendous. The nurses, doctors and assistants were all great.” He wouldn’t hesitate to recommend the hospital to anyone. In fact, his father is having some heart issues, and Eric has told him that, in his opinion, there’s only one place to go—The Bluhm Cardiovascular Institute. “It’s the only place I’d send anyone,” he said.

## Contact

For more information regarding heart rhythm disorders and available treatments, please call the Bluhm Cardiovascular Institute at **1-866-662-8467** or [request a first time appointment online](#).