

Andrea Wongsam –Heart Attack Survivor



At 35 years old and 13 weeks pregnant, the last thing on Andrea's mind was that she was having a heart attack. Her jaw was tightening and she was becoming intensely overheated, but she chalked it up to being pregnant.

"I thought I was having heart burn associated with my pregnancy. I just ignored the pain for awhile, but then it got worse," she recalls.

After unsuccessfully trying to tough it out at work, Andrea went to rest in her car. It was March in Washington D.C. and only thirty-five degrees outside, but she just couldn't get cool. Within minutes, she became so hot that she opened all of her windows and literally began taking off all her clothes.

It was then that she decided to go home, making her long commute in nothing but her jewelry. By this point, her left arm had stopped functioning, so she had to drive with one hand. The thought of a heart attack still never crossed her mind.

The pain became so great that she decided to go to the Urgent Care Center near her house. That's when the doctor told her the alarming news: she was having a heart attack. Due to the extreme severity of her case, Andrea was airlifted to another hospital where she received an angioplasty and a stent. For 10 days, she lay alone in the ICU. They had saved her life but lost her baby's.

Doctors explained to Andrea that her body had been producing too many platelets, which formed a blood clot and caused her heart attack. Andrea suffered from a congenital condition that caused her body to produce too much bone marrow, but had to discontinue use of a regulating medication when she became pregnant.

After her event, Andrea's life came to a standstill when her mind flooded with fear and anxiety. As part of her recovery, she decided her first order of business was to change her thoughts.

"I began practicing being in a good mental place every day. Your outlook makes a huge difference," she says.

Inspired by survivor stories she read at GoRedForWomen.org, Andrea started making dramatic choices to turn her life and health back around. She began exercising and choosing healthier foods, and in doing so, empowered her mind to see herself differently.

"I honestly believe that making good choices puts me in a better mindset. I'm proud that I am creating a better quality of life," she adds.

Andrea has put her positive outlook into practice. She now participates in fitness boot camps and organized her own team for an American Heart Association Heart Walk.

"You live under the false pretense that you're healthy and young. It's challenging to get motivated, but I have to! Women who have been through this understand how much we need each other's support."

Now, Andrea can make sense of it all and is grateful that she's been able to turn a heart attack into something good.

"I Go Red for all the women out there that live with heart disease, including myself."