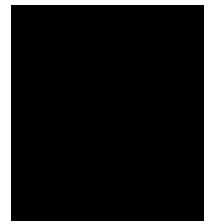


Jenna Bell – Heart Disease Survivor



At 23 years old, the last thing Jenna Bell expected to hear her doctor say was “You’re at risk for sudden cardiac death” and hand her a brochure on heart failure.

She was healthy, thin, young and happy, but her heart was functioning just barely above those in need of transplants.

It wasn’t a total surprise to Jenna that something was wrong, however. She was getting ready to move, her fiancé was in Iraq, she was teaching special education and attending graduate school, so when her heart started racing for no apparent reason, she chalked it up to stress. Once it started happening more regularly, Jenna decided to see her doctor.

She was given an EKG and told she had an idiopathic cardiomyopathy and underwent more tests to understand the severity. A cardiac catheterization determined that her heart was dangerously weak, but her condition was idiopathic, meaning they had no idea what caused it. Immediately, Jenna assumed a low-sodium diet and began taking medication.

“I felt so frustrated and scared. It wasn’t what I expected at only 23 years old,” she reflects.

She began wearing an exterior defibrillator the size of a book bag and even greeted her fiancé Dan with it strapped on when he came home on leave from Iraq. It was Dan that inspired her to make a complete lifestyle change.

“Dan was the catalyst for my change. I wanted to be around for him and have kids with him. I wanted to see my sister graduate from college. It rocked me to the core to think of all the things I would miss if my heart failed,” she explains.

Once she was fitted with an internal defibrillator, she was determined to make better choices for her heart. She began incorporating exercise into her routine and reducing the stress in her life dramatically. Jenna started letting go of things that didn’t matter and putting looser deadlines on the things that did. Knowing that she’d try to take on too much at the onset, she was vigilant in her approach to take baby steps. As time went on, she added more goals but still remained realistic.

“I don’t think I can pinpoint one thing that’s changed me. It’s everything together. I reduce my sodium, I exercise with a trainer, I listen to my body,” she says.

Now that she’s on the upswing of life, Jenna has more energy than ever. She is running in a 5K, something she’d never have thought possible. She’s even working to get her heart healthy enough to hopefully have children one day.

Jenna has some advice to every woman out there.

“People think it won’t happen to them, but heart disease isn’t biased. It doesn’t exclude anyone. You’ve got to be proactive. You’re never too young for this to happen, so you have to listen to your body.”

Jenna is determined to get the word out on women and heart disease. She even plans to hand out Go Red For Women red dress pins as favors at her upcoming wedding. She sums up her outlook perfectly and poignantly.

“I Go Red for what is yet to come. I Go Red for what’s ahead.”