



Faces of CHD | Michelle's Story



Meet Michelle K of Calgary, AB

Age 34

CHD Diagnosis: Shone's Complex

After my coarctation repair surgery at age 5, my health was good and uneventful until my late 20's. My husband and I got married in 2012, and we wanted to start a family shortly after. I was referred to the high risk pregnancy clinic for evaluation. It was then that they discovered I had mitral valve stenosis and needed surgery. During the surgery they discovered I had a small mitral valve and was diagnosed Shone's Complex, the surgery was not successful. I was referred to cardiac rehab to try to improve my cardiovascular health, but I continued to decline and was eventually referred for Heart and Lung Transplant. During that assessment process it was discovered that my artery had occluded after surgery and was referred to heart failure clinic. The heart failure medications improved my health back to where it had been before the surgery. My heart function cardiologist fought for approval for a device called CardioMEMS and I was the first person in Western Canada to receive the device. It's a small device the size of a paper clip that is implanted into my pulmonary, it monitors my heart failure measurements internally and allows my medical team to adjust my medications accordingly, even before I sense the change. It has changed my life!

The biggest challenge dealing with my CHD has been the impact it's had on my adult life. When we are children, our parents shoulder most of the burden, they may not always tell us everything or try to minimize the impact; we don't always understand our CHD. Then when we become adults and independent, we can be surprised when we have a health crisis or our health begins to decline, can feel jolted by the reality of our condition, your not prepared. CHD can have a significant impact on your career, travel and enjoyment of life.

Some of the best advice I've been given about dealing with my CHD is to share my story, talk about it. As your health changes, your anxiety increases and you are less able to process your

situation. By sharing my story, it has empowered me and allowed me to be transparent about my everything.

Cardiac rehab was a great opportunity for me and had such a positive impact. When I was a child my activity was restricted, as I grew older, I became resistant to doing physical activity. Through Cardiac Rehab, I learned to change my perspective and it really helped to improve my health.

My advice for those that are transitioning into adult CHD care, it's really important to connect with others living with CHD, to build a community of support and understanding. Also, keep your appointments!

Dealing with all the health and medical issues the last several years has really taught me to appreciate life and to take all the joy out of each day, take nothing for granted. Although I worry that I won't have enough time, as I look into the future I have hope. Medical technology has advanced in leaps and bounds, I will continue to live life to the fullest, live my best life.

