

Former Semi-Pro Arena Football Player Bridged To Heart Transplant With Artificial Heart

When Justin Ryder, 35, was discharged from University of Arizona Medical Center in Tucson on May 20, he had a new donor heart beating in his chest and a new baby boy waiting for him at home in Las Vegas, his heart transplant made possible by 83 days of life with the SynCardia temporary Total Artificial Heart.

"The SynCardia Total Artificial Heart is a lifesaving device for people like me who have severe heart failure," said Ryder. "It bought me that time; it gave me that peace of mind that my new artificial heart wasn't going to stop, that it was going to keep me alive until I got that call for a heart transplant."

Ryder, an athletic father of four and former semi-pro arena football player, has battled heart problems most of his adult life. He was diagnosed with an enlarged heart at age 18 when he tried to join the Navy. Over the years, he underwent multiple surgeries, including mechanical replacement of his mitral and aortic valves and implantation of a pacemaker and a defibrillator. Ryder did well after each of the surgeries and was able to resume playing football.

However, by 2012, Ryder's ejection fraction -- a measurement of how much blood the heart pumps out to the body during each beat -- had dropped to just 10 percent compared to a normal range of 50 to 60 percent. That's when doctors approached him about implanting a device to bridge him to a heart transplant.

"The doctors told me about a left ventricular assist device (LVAD) and the Total Artificial Heart, but said the LVAD surgery was more risky due to my mechanical heart valves," said Ryder. "I went online and researched the Total Artificial Heart as much as I could. People were doing so well on it. People were hiking, riding bikes, living day-to-day on it. I had three kids at the time and my wife was pregnant with our fourth. I knew that for me, to prolong my life, the Total Artificial Heart was the best choice."

On Dec. 3, 2012, doctors removed Ryder's failing heart and replaced it with the artificial heart. Within a week of the implant surgery, he was up and walking the hospital floor. His recovery went so well that just three weeks after receiving the artificial heart, Ryder was switched to the Freedom® portable driver, the world's first wearable power supply for the Total Artificial Heart. Weighing 13.5 pounds, the Freedom portable driver gave Ryder greater mobility within the hospital and on hospital grounds while he waited for his donor heart.

After 83 days of life with the Total Artificial Heart, on Feb. 24, Ryder received the call he'd been waiting for, that a matching donor heart had become available. However, following his heart transplant, Ryder's body began to reject the donor

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Published on Surgical Products (<http://www.surgicalproductsmag.com>)

heart, which delayed his recovery. By May, Ryder had regained much of his strength and was ready to be discharged from the hospital to continue his recovery at home with his wife and four children.

"I'm most looking forward to being with my family, seeing my kids," said Ryder before his discharge. "The last time I saw them was Easter and my wife and I just had a baby boy in February, so it will be nice to get home to him. Getting back to normal is what I've been waiting for, for a long time."

Source URL (retrieved on 01/27/2015 - 10:10am):

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