



Lorraine – Chronic angina pain

Mother of two Lorraine, from Lalor in Victoria, is one of the few Australians fortunate enough to have the opportunity to try neurostimulation for the treatment of pain associated with angina.

“It started about 15 or so years ago. Just out of the blue I got this crushing chest pain.”

As both of Lorraine’s parents had suffered heart attacks her diagnosis didn’t come as a total shock.

“Because I had grown up with it, I wasn’t so afraid of it.

“First of all I went to the doctors and they sent me to the hospital, who said it was angina.

“Over a period of time they did all the tests and found it was the small arteries causing the problem, and of course they can’t bypass those. So I was left with just medication.

“They had me on nitrates and all that kind of stuff. Because they like to keep your cholesterol right down they put me on cholesterol tablets as well, and beta blockers and all those sort of things. The whole lot.

“However it got to the stage where I was on a lot of medication, but I was still getting nine or ten attacks a day. I was still in pain.”

Lorraine struggled along for a while before her cardiologist came up with a solution. He had become aware of a pain management specialist in Melbourne who had been given a grant to implant neurostimulators in a number of patients with angina.

“I was just lucky I had the right cardiologist who knew about this grant, otherwise I still wouldn’t know about the neurostimulator.

“I went to see the cardiologist and then all the other people you have to go see: the physio and the psychiatrist and all.

“I passed all of that and then was able to have a temporary stimulator put in to see if that worked, which it did really well. But I got an infection. So then there was a debate about whether they could put a permanent one in, and if they did how long they would wait.”

After considering her case, the infectious diseases doctors and cardiologists agreed that Lorraine should go ahead with a permanent implant. However, her neurosurgeon warned that another infection may have devastating consequences, such as meningitis.

“I said to my husband ‘what do you think’ and he said ‘it’s worth a try’.

“Our philosophy is if I was going to die, that day, whether it was from meningitis or not, my time was up. So we went ahead with it.”

Unfortunately, Lorraine did develop an infection, which is now countered by antibiotics.

“They weren’t sure whether they were going to take the neurostimulator out or leave it in but they decided to leave it in - thank goodness.

“I’ll be on antibiotics for life, but that’s a small price to pay for the benefits I’m getting out of it. That’s for sure.

“Now, the most I’ll get angina is three times a day. Some days I don’t get it at all. I’m able to exercise, which I couldn’t do before. I can now do the housework without vacuuming half a room and having to stop. So I’ve got a much better quality of life than I had before. I can do all the things now that I was having trouble doing before.”

Despite the infection, Lorraine hasn’t looked back.

“They told me that 25-50 percent improvement was the most I could expect. I think the cardiologist worked out with the temporary one that the improvement was 97 percent! To have even just 25 percent better lifestyle would have been better than what I was putting up with.

“I would advise people that if they were seriously thinking about having it done – do it!”