

## GAIL ALEXANDER-WRIGHT



To hear Gail Alexander-Wright tell her life story, you'd think there were no limits to what she could do. She was a hands-on mom with a teenage daughter at home and a husband stationed in Iraq; an owner of a custom cake business; an active oil drilling reservist in the U.S. Navy; and an avid exerciser—a typical daily workout for her was running several miles and then lifting weights.

But like many women Gail had to learn the hard way that “doing it all” was taking its toll on her body.

“I now know that fitting all this in and sleeping only four to five hours each night was not healthy,” Gail says. “But I was young and generally felt good so I didn’t really think anything of my schedule.”

That is, until she finished a workout one evening and began to experience all the classic symptoms of a heart attack: sweating, nausea, chest pains, and numbness in her arm. Gail had them all.

Luckily, Gail’s daughter acted quickly and called her aunt, who was a nurse, who immediately advised her to dial 9-1-1.

At the ER Gail was treated for the immediate danger, which was a blockage in an artery, but she was also made aware of a bigger problem: her high-stress lifestyle coupled with an extensive family history of heart disease meant she’d need to make changes to ensure her long-term survival.

“I didn’t know until this happened that my father and all of his siblings had had heart attacks relatively early in life,” she says. “I also learned that my diet was not as healthy as I thought it was—my blood sugar showed that I was pre-diabetic.”

All these discoveries proved too much to handle at once, and Gail suffered from depression while in the hospital.

“I was so frustrated that this had happened to me and even more upset to find out that I was doing so many things wrong,” she says.

The youngest person in her cardiac rehab at 37 years old, Gail was making good progress toward recovery when she suffered a second setback six months later: a stroke. She had no idea that blurred vision was a symptom and it took an appointment with an optometrist and then a neurologist to confirm the diagnosis.

For the second time in less than one year, Gail began the rehab process. The woman who used to run miles at a time was now focused on getting her walking stride back to normal.

Five years later Gail is very different from the frenzied woman she used to be. Still active, she monitors her exercise closely and doesn’t let her heart rate get too high. She also sleeps far more and has improved her diet dramatically.

“Fruits, vegetables, whole grains and very little red meat are what I stick to these days,” Gail says.

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Gail has made her health journey a family affair as well. Her daughter—now in college— has had a cardiac check-up, lost 30 pounds and adjusted her own eating habits to match her mother’s.

“I have shared this journey with my daughter and as many other women as I can because I don’t believe there is enough awareness about this disease—especially for women,” Gail says. “I want to make sure that women young and old know that heart disease is our No. 1. killer.”

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