



Speaking from Experience *Coronary Heart Disease*

Transcript for chapter 6 of 8: Lifestyle changes

Barry - The limitations, since the heart attack: I can't lift, I can't suddenly exert myself, I can't... I just can't take life for granted like I once did.

Ligita - After the angioplasty you have to slow down a little bit and you have to know your limits. You shouldn't do straight away what you were doing, and you can't expect actually to do it. So if you feel tired you just have to have a rest.

Jim and Julie - We had to reverse a lot of roles. I had to do the gardening and the lawns and Jim did the cooking and helped with the children while I worked outside.

Avis - Perhaps with some of the heavier jobs that I was doing around the farm - pushing cows and calves, and I could pick up a bale of hay and sort of throw it from here to there. And even the gardening, I'm sort of a little bit too frightened to do too much now, so I've probably eased off on the heavier jobs. But actually I enjoy watching the others do them for me.

Albie - I decided to retire after the first heart attack, after talking to my doctor who said that the stress factor - which I was in a very stressful job - he said that if that's one of the things that you can alleviate from your lifestyle, it would be great to be able to do it. I was in a position that I could do it so it was a decision that my wife and myself talked about and eventually made that decision on.

Marc - I found sitting at home for so long that I suffered terribly still with the anxiety. And that was the main reason I stayed at home so long. The cardiologist didn't want to send me back because of the severe anxiety that I was suffering. I seemed to have suffered more anxiety than what most heart patients would suffer. So that kept me off work a lot longer.

Jim and Julie - We shifted away to Colac, where our parents live, for support. And I had to try and find myself a job, that someone would employ me with my condition.

Marc - I needed the change. I couldn't work the long hours... I didn't want to work the long hours anymore. Your perspective changes. You want to spend more time with the family after a heart attack. So I wanted to get out of the homicide squad, so I transferred - took promotion and transferred to a section that would allow me to finish work at 4:30 every day and go home to the family.

Albie - Since I've retired, I'm taking on the president of a very large golf club to keep myself active. We are very large and run over a five million dollar business in the golf club. I'm responsible for the budget in that and also making sure that the club continues to prosper both in the area of financial and of course development. So it keeps me very, very busy. I would be spending between forty and fifty hours a week in the golf club now.

Marc - I suppose I'm happier now with my lifestyle. I've lost thirteen kilos since the heart attack, I don't smoke, I spend more time with the family, I'm exercising on a daily basis and as hard as I possibly can.

Barry - You've got to be very careful when you're exercising but overall you feel fine. You feel better - the more you do the better you feel.

Marc - I wouldn't recommend you play squash, but I'm told by my cardiologist you can play tennis, all those things. And my fitness level is higher than what it was prior to having the heart attack.

Jim and Julie - Jill and me both joined the Colac 'Rock and Roll' club. After a short period of time we started dancing in competitions. Now we travel all over Victoria and have great fun. And we find it's good rehabilitation. It has made us happier, that we can do something together.

Barry - The hardest thing to do was to give up smoking. But from the night of the heart attack until today, I've never had a smoke. At first it's very hard, but after a time it becomes repulsive.

Avis - Knowing what I know now, years ago I would have never picked a cigarette up and popped it in my mouth. Because they seem to think... well, they know, that the blocked arteries come from that because my cholesterol wasn't high. So if anyone's thinking about putting a cigarette in their mouth - don't.

Marc - I gave up smoking but no, it wasn't difficult, because somebody waved some mortality under my nose and said that if you keep going, we'll give you about another ten years. I want to be here a lot longer than age fifty years. So, no, it wasn't hard at all. Don't even miss them.

Barry - The rehabilitation group also have lectures by various people in the hospital who come and lecture about the fat content in food and how much fat you can have in a day and how much sugar you can have.

Albie - My biggest problem was getting away from the sweets. I'm a very big sweet eater, with cheesecakes and all of that sort of stuff. But I had to... that was a bit of a hard thing to get away from.

Avis - I've had to change my diet lots. It's rather difficult living on a dairy farm, when you've got milk on tap. And you know you can't buy butter now and support the dairy industry. I think it has been good for all of us, but it's mainly just the milks and butters and the fats and things like that.

Ligita - When the war started, I was just sixteen. And this is a time when you like different things and you are growing and your body needs. And we couldn't have cakes, we couldn't have butter, we couldn't have that. So I went missing these things. And then we went to Germany, because the Russians came in our country, and we lived in this place, Bergisch Camp, where we couldn't have these things again. So my body hasn't been able to get the things that I have wanted. And now, when I came to Australia, and we more or less could afford these things, and I'm told I shouldn't have them, then I have the inner fear - I think,



well, when I grew up, I couldn't afford and I didn't have them. Now they are there, but I'm told not to have them. What about if something happens again and I can't afford and I didn't have them when I could afford? So it's just like a mental block.

Barry - Changing the diet is really changing your habits, ignoring the wants of your tastebuds, basically. And it's almost technical. You look at what you have to have and push away what you want to have.

Marc - I changed my diet drastically from your bacon and egg and cheese sandwich every second day, to I eat fish six days out of seven, rice, vegetables and lots of fruit.

Jim and Julie - You shop together and read all of the articles on the shelves and find out what's in them: the fat content, the cholesterol content. All these things come naturally to you after you've done your rehabilitation and learnt. You teach yourself to become a better eater.

Barry - One has to have something to look forward to. You can't get out of bed and aimlessly wander about. You must have an interest. The computer, to some extent, has provided that. But you still need the physical side, as I was physical before. I keep looking to that.

Avis - I really don't think my priorities have changed that much because I still like to do my own thing and I'm still family orientated. But, no, I don't sort of think that tomorrow might be the last day. I just have a lot of fun and, as I said, try not to worry about too much. If it happens, it happens.

Albie - My priorities, I guess, have changed. Basically the fact that I'm very aware that if I'm not there, the sort of things that my family is going to have to experience. And it has made me more aware to do the right thing, both with my diet and my exercise. I guess it's something that you don't like to think about but there is the time that maybe it will happen and so I guess I put my life in order. I guess that's what I've done.