



## healthy to heart surgery

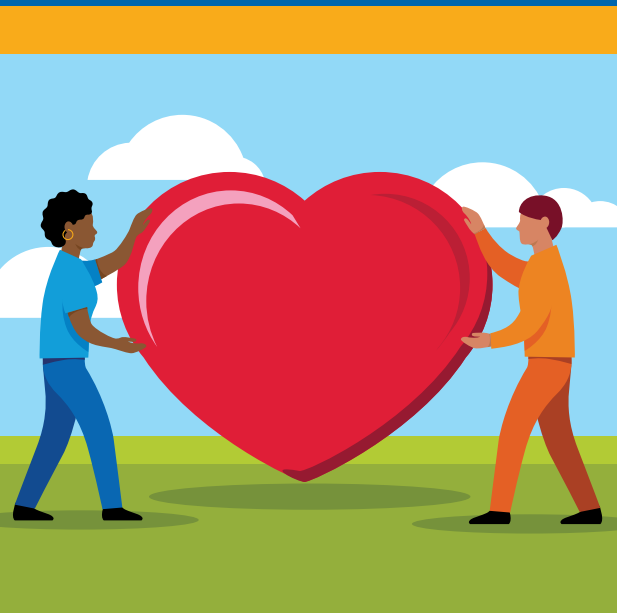
When we feel good, it can be easy to ignore the signs our body sends when it's trying to tell us something isn't quite right. Small indicators are often dismissed as nothing more than a sore or an ache that we don't give much more thought, when in fact they are often signs that a bigger problem is quietly brewing.

Megan Wall, a category specialist, Strategic Procurement & Contracts, from Chevron Australia Pty Ltd., felt like she was on top of the world. She reached a milestone age and felt great, mentally and physically, only to get knocked down by heart surgery. Here's Megan's story, as told in her own words.

It all started in early 2020, when I was having trouble with deep breathing. It got to the point where even a normal walk caused me to nearly blackout, but I wasn't unfit, so I wrote it off as nothing – as far as I knew, there was no reason to be alarmed. Finally, after my daughter kept nagging me about the issue, I went to see a family doctor.

**1 in 500**  
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to getting HOCM

HCOM is hyper obstructive cardiomyopathy, a disease where the heart muscle becomes thickened.



learn more at  
[septal myectomy for hypertrophic cardiomyopathy – sydney heart and lung](#)

An electrocardiogram and stress test didn't show any cause for concern and the doctor sent me back home with instructions to take aspirin daily and to make sure I kept my body hydrated with lots of water.

Near the end of 2020, I turned 50 and felt fitter and healthier than I had been in a long time. Right up until April 2021.

That's when I experienced another episode of difficult breathing, only this time it didn't go away. The next day, my doctor referred me to a cardiologist for full blood tests and an echocardiogram. The diagnosis? Hyper obstructive cardiomyopathy (HOCM). It's commonly genetic, but mine appeared not to be and thankfully, my family, including my daughter, have all been tested and given the all-clear.

One in 500 people are prone to getting HOCM. If you get it, it's something you'll have the rest of your life as it's treatable but not curable. Over time, the condition causes the heart wall to thicken, which forces the heart to work harder to pump blood and oxygenate the body.

If you're lucky, like me, you notice a change in your breathing. My heart's septum wall was 2 cm thick (0.79 inches), whereas a normal heart is 0.37 (0.15 inches). HOCM can greatly increase the risk of sudden cardiac arrest, primarily because those it kills haven't been diagnosed with HOCM to know they have it.

Tests showed that I had the cardiovascular health of someone 10 years younger and was an excellent candidate for surgery. The doctor prescribed varying doses of beta blockers to slow my heart rate and reduce my risks. I could tolerate the dose, but it didn't make enough of a difference, and surgery was scheduled. The full open-heart kind. Surgeons cut away the thickened part of my heart and now I sport a large scar. That was late February 2022, and recovery took longer than expected. I'm a little way off from full speed, but I'll get there. I'm now feeling pretty good and luckily love gentle walks by the beach.

I don't think I was prepared for the physical, mental and emotional toll of an experience like this. It's traumatizing, and I'm still processing what's happened to me and support resources available to me through Chevron have helped. I made full use of the employee assistance and worklife services (EAP-WL), and I'm so thankful to the Australia business unit Health & Medical team. They've been an incredible support, particularly Haani Beswick, who has listened to me laugh, rant and cry over the last few months.

I had no idea that Chevron would provide the level of support it has. We're so lucky to have these resources, the wonderful humans and their care. I also want to say thanks to my amazing teammates for regularly checking in to see how I'm doing, visiting with food and hugs, running errands and taking me out for coffee.

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## **the biggest lesson I've learned in all of this**

**You need to listen to those small warning signs when your body sends them. If something doesn't feel right, get it checked out. It may be nothing at all or it may just be the decision that saves your life.**