

Recovery from AVM (Arteriovenous Malformation) Stroke - Jason Gaudette

When his wife asked him why he was slurring his words Jason Gaudette had no idea that that was a sign of stroke. He found out that the AVM (Arteriovenous Malformation) he was born with would bleed the day after he would find out that he was going to become a father and that he would need life-saving brain surgery to ensure he got to meet his baby son.

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Transcript:

Jason Gaudette 0:00

I remember watching my son learn to walk. And I was like, buddy, I know exactly what you're going through right now when I'm seeing him, you know, struggle and fall and stuff. And I'm thinking, I got it, buddy. I know what men Keep going, keep going. Yeah, it was. It was a struggle. And there are still times today people wouldn't know it probably by watching but you know, I have sometimes bad days. And, you know, I got to think more about what I'm doing and, you know, turning corners walking a certain way. There's a lot more thought goes into it than I show in my body.

Intro 0:40

This is recovery after stroke with Bill Gasiamis helping you go from where you are to where you'd rather be.

Bill 0:47

Jason, welcome to the program.

Jason Gaudette0:50

Thanks, Bill. Happy to be here.

Bill 0:52

Yeah, thank you for being here. I really appreciate it. You know, what's interesting is how willing people are from wherever in the world that I find them and get in touch with them to be on the podcast and share their story. I really appreciate that they do that because it's not possible. Otherwise, this podcast is without people sharing this story. Tell me a little bit about what happened to you.

Jason Gaudette1:17

All right, so February 1, 2015, was just like any other regular day. Except it was Super Bowl Sunday. I don't know if you're you're probably more of a football-like soccer fan. And then NFL.

Bill 1:35

is. Let me tell you this. Don't leave us. Forget about it here. The pubs go crazy. They feel that the rooms Its madness. It really is.

What happened to Jason?

Jason Gaudette1:47

Yeah, so I'm a huge football fan. And I'm a Green Bay Packers fan. Sorry, is anyone out there who thought against that? But yeah, that's my that's my team of choice. But on that particular day, I was 2015 it was New England against Seattle.

And Russell Wilson had just got intercepted at the one-yard line by Malcolm Butler. And that was the end of the game, they blew it Seattle had a chance to win it. But of course, New England won it like they usually do.

And right after the game, my wife said to me, she goes, can you come up to the kitchen? I was like, Yeah, sure. And I was shocked. She showed me a positive

pregnancy test. And we had tried for over four years with no success. And we're pretty much ready to throw in the towel on that. And so it was extremely exciting.

But at the same time, I wasn't hundred, it was almost like I wasn't 100% convinced. So I said to her, I go, are you sure? And she said I did it twice. And so I said, Okay, well, I said this is amazing. was so so stoked. And then she said, I'll book, I'll call tomorrow and book a blood test to go to my doctor and, and confirm it. 100%.

So that was exciting. Then the next day, February 2, which is my father's birthday, I left for work that day, a normal day, I remember driving to work like it was yesterday because I was actually listening to the song from my creed with arms wide open came on. And it was it's all about having a kid and I'm you know thinking all about it, like oh my god, I'm gonna be dad bring a child into this world.

And I was super excited about it. Like, I gotta teach, I gotta teach this child everything and lead them down the right path and, you know, hopefully, make all the right decisions. You know, I made a few wrong ones. So I could teach them not to make those ones. So anyway, I pick up my buddy, Kurt who worked with me at the time, and we carried on our way. And then all of a sudden, I said to him I go, buddy, I'm super tired, I go, I go, do you want to just pull over into a parking lot and have a quick, have a quick nap?

Intro 4:08

If you've had a stroke, and during recovery, you'll know what a scary and confusing time it can be, you're likely to have a lot of questions going through your mind. Like, how long will it take to recover? Will I actually recover? What things should I avoid? In case I make matters worse? Doctors will explain things. But obviously, because you've never had a stroke before, you probably don't know what questions to ask.

If this is you, you may be missing out on doing things that could help speed up your recovery. If you find yourself in that situation, stop worrying, and head to recovery after stroke calm, where you can download a guide that will help you.

It's called seven questions to ask your doctor about your stroke. These seven questions are the ones Bill wished he'd asked when he was recovering from a stroke. They'll not only help you better understand your condition, but they'll also

help you take a more active role in your recovery. head to the website now, recoveryafterstroke.com and download the guide it's free.

Jason Gaudette5:17

And I run a fitness club and I'm fortunate to have really good owners that I worked for. And you know if I'm 15 minutes late half hour late, they don't they don't really care. They don't really question me we have that kind of relationship. And he was like No, Jay, he's like, just lets we'll stop and we'll grab a coffee and you know, you'll wake up he's like, come on, man. So I was thinking like, yeah, you're right, man.

Come on, let's go whatever. We stopped, and we quickly went into a video game store where they sell pool tables and pinball machines and stuff. Because my father, like I said it was his birthday. He used to be a pin big pinball lover. So I wanted to see how much these things are. Well, I mean, we walked out pretty fast. They were way out of my, budget standpoint, but.

We carried on to work, got to work, had the coffee, felt good, went about my day, had a good day, got in the car, drove home, and dropped him off. And then I called my dad because I didn't call him and they were really, really close. So-called him wished him a happy birthday. Apologize that I had taken so long to call him. And he was cool with it. We talked for about another I'd say half an hour on my drive.

And then I got home. And I did what was my usual routine. I grabbed my dog Duke I got a yellow lab and took him outside for him to do his business. And then I came in and I was going to go into the basement and do a workout because I have gym equipment downstairs.

And I realized I was like you know what I got to use the washroom first so I was walking through the kitchen that head to the washroom and my wife asked me a question like, how was your day or something? And I answered her and she said, Why are you slurring and you've had a stroke. I don't know how yours was, but I didn't hear myself slurring.

And it like, you know, made me a little bit almost argumentative. I was just like, I got my backup. I was like, slurring? what are you talking about I'm like I had a long day. I said, I got to use the washroom because if I don't if I don't do this, now, if I don't go work out now, I'm not going to work out and I don't want to

miss my workout.

She was like, all right, whatever. So I didn't think anything about it. And then I went to the washroom, and then I went to pull my pants up. And I couldn't use my left hand. And it just, it was so surreal. It was just, I was telling it to do something, and it wouldn't listen to me. It was like we weren't connected. And I came out of the washroom and I said, you know, honey, I think something's wrong.

She said, What do you mean, what's wrong? Like, something's wrong. I said I can't really use my left hand. And she's a smart girl. She's in the science field. And she said, sit down for a second. I sat down and she said, smiling. I smiled. And of course, when I smiled, the left side of my face didn't move. And she said, Are you doing that on purpose?

And when she said that, that's when my heart? Oh, yeah, that's when that's when my heart really started to pound because I knew that that meant like, for her to be concerned, I need to be concerned because I'm usually the one who's concerned. And she's like, Oh, it's all good. Don't worry. So we live about 10 minutes down the road from a hospital.

So we jumped in the car, I now know, yeah, I should have called 911. No doubt about it, with the whole fast. So got in the car and headed down to the hospital. And I remember sitting in a waiting room. And there were about four people in the waiting room. And I just was looking over at them. And I was like, kind of in a daze.

There is an upside to everything

And all I remember thinking was, I'm going before for all of you. And then I said to my wife, I said you need to go I think you should go let them let them know that you know, something's really wrong here because I'm a little bit nervous. So she went and she told the girl at the triage that, you know, I think my husband's having a stroke.

So they brought me up there and they took my blood pressure. And the woman said, No, I don't think he's having a stroke, his blood pressure is really good. So I had that little moment of relief. I was like, Ah, you know, I'm, I'm good, thank

God. And then she goes, but what will take a CT scan just to make sure?

And so as they were going to take, take the CT scan, I gave my wife my phone and I said, you need to call Steve, who is my boss, and I go, you need to call Doug, who is one of the owners of the gym and call my dad if, if anything, if anything goes wrong. So I had the CAT scan.

And next thing I know, this guy's looking over me and he says, Have you ever been on an ambulance ride before? And I said no. And he said, Okay, well, you're going to now he goes, you're having a stroke right now and you got bleeding going on in your brain. And we can't help you here. We're going to have to send you down to Toronto Western where better capable to help you in. Wow. Like,

Bill 10:29

wow,

Jason Gaudette 10:30

I don't even know what else to say.

Bill 10:31

That's just that's very wow, man. So, you know, when you said you were tired, you're in the car with your buddy and you're feeling tired and you needed to have a sleep? Was that something that you normally do? Or was that something that you think now was related to what was about to happen? Or what was happening?

Jason Gaudette 10:48

Yeah, now, I think that it was probably my guess. I'm no doctor, but was maybe that I had like a real slow bleed going on at that point. And then, you know, as the day went on, more and more and more damage took place. I'm so grateful that I first of all that I that I drove home safely and that I got home before you know, shit hit the fan. You know

Bill 11:13

Yeah, so you're like me, you're

Jason Gaudette 11:15

my allowed to say that. I am allowed to say that.

Bill 11:18

You are allowed to say shit.

Jason Gaudette 11:20

Oh, oops, oops. Oh, yeah, we can edit this

Bill 11:23

We are stroke survivors man we are allowed to say shit, you know, whatever.

Jason Gaudette 11:27

Exactly.

Bill 11:31

You know, you're gonna have you. You had the conversation with your wife about I'm not slurring. I'm not doing any of that stuff. Well, I had the conversation with my wife, because she noticed me walking differently. And I said, I'm not walking definitely leave me alone. I've got work to do.

Jason Gaudette 11:50

Exactly.

Bill 11:51

And that was about four days after I noticed the symptoms. So I ignored it for four days.

Jason Gaudette 11:57

Oh, wow

Bill 11:57

yeah. So you seem like you ignored it for about three. Maybe you were sort of starting to notice things maybe three days before the actual hospital visit?

Jason Gaudette 12:09

No, I like only started noticing the day before or the day the morning of

Bill 12:15

Right okay. It is so strange. Everyone I speak to has a completely different version, a completely different story of how they experienced their stroke and what they noticed. So you're in hospital now. And your wife is she's still at the hospital with you.

Jason Gaudette 12:31

Oh, yeah, she stayed there the whole time. She's a rock star. And she called. She

called my dad and told my dad. And at the time, my family lived in Northern Ontario in Sioux Sainte Marie, that's where I'm I'm born and raised. And so she calls my dad and she I guess she says, Jason's having a stroke.

What are you talking about? Jason's having a stroke. He's, you know, he's he. I just talked to him. I just got off the phone with him, like two hours ago

Bill 13:00

Yeah.

Jason Gaudette 13:01

And she's like, yeah, I'm at the hospital with him right now. And, and, yeah, so him and my mom, they, he had to wake my mom up. She was gone to bed. And then they had to, I guess they would paste all night until morning came when they get on a plane and then fly over.

Bill 13:19

Yeah. So you know. The other thing that's interesting about you and me, is that when I was in hospital, I realized that it was pretty serious because I couldn't feel my entire left side by the time I got there. I also knew that I was going through triage and into a bed away before everyone else. And that was exciting for some reason because I didn't have to wait 45 minutes. What's with that man? What is it with that's so crazy?

Jason Gaudette 13:48

in a sick way?

Bill 13:49

Yeah

Jason Gaudette 13:49

In a sick way.

Bill 13:51

And I talk about it when I do presentations. I do a lot of presentations on the topic and my experience. And one of the things I specifically mentioned is that they gave me the red carpet treatment when I got to the hospital, and I was straight through and I didn't have to wait. Such a funny thing that you said that.

Jason Gaudette 14:09

It's so true.

Bill 14:12

So what happened after you were admitted to the hospital? So do so they've found there's a bleed on the brain? And now what's the process? How long does it take for them to treat you?

AVM (Arteriovenous Malformation) Ruptured



Jason Gaudette 14:22

Yeah. So this is pretty cool. So they basically informed me that it was caused by an AVM (Arteriovenous Malformation) they informed me my wife was up. And obviously, you know what that is, but for anyone out there that doesn't it's arterial venous malformation, which is a cluster of blood vessels. It's a birth defect and I never knew it. I was a ticking time bomb from the day I was born. And boom, that night, it was time to erupt.

Bill 14:51

How old were you?

Jason Gaudette 14:52

that I was 36 at the time, I'm 40 now.

Bill 14:56

Yeah. Okay. I was 37. Yeah.

Jason Gaudette 15:00

So a lot of people around that age I find it's kind of strange. was yours. It was here's a rupture as well.

Bill 15:07

Yeah. And I ruptured AVM (Arteriovenous Malformation) you know 37.

Jason Gaudette 15:10

Oh, same thing. Wow.

Bill 15:11

Yeah. So tell me, tell me about the hospital stay.

Jason Gaudette 15:17

So I don't know about you. But they put me on some Twilight drug. And I never did drugs in my life. But, man, this stuff was neat. I was I remember, I remember sitting there and them telling me, like I'm in this room, I guess, surgery room or whatever. And there's like seven doctors all to me. And I'm like, wow, right. And I still had my sense of humor.

I wasn't afraid. I was calling them the Dream Team. And then so then they told me we're going to go make an incision in your groin, and we're going to go up from you're going to your brain. And I said, Excuse me, I go, there's a passageway from the growing to the brain. And they said, Yeah, there is I couldn't believe it. I was like, Whoa, that's crazy.

So I literally remember watching them make the incision in my growing, and I couldn't care less about it. It was like, wow, that's neat. Like, there was no part of me was like, That felt pain or was like, Oh, my God, I'm scared or it was weird. And so then it seemed to me like it was maybe five minutes. My wife tells me it was more like four hours, and I guess four or five hours. And I think what happened was that they tried to, they tried to use glue to clot, I guess, the AVM (Arteriovenous Malformation) and it didn't work. And it actually caused more bleeding when they did that.



So, they went out and told my wife that, you know, the procedure didn't work, and they had to get her to, you know, sign off on papers to proceed with a craniotomy. And I remember them saying to me, literally, they just said, Jason, the procedure didn't work. And I said, Okay, you need to cut my head open now? And they said, Yes. And I said, Okay, I said, but I have to tell you something first. And now I now knowing this now, I would take this back, because like, it's putting a lot of pressure on people. So that already has pressure on them. So all these doctors and I said, Guys, other than my wife, you guys are the only people that are going to know what I'm about to tell you. I found out yesterday that I'm going to be a father.

And we've Oh, yeah. And we've tried for a long time for this. My child is going to need a dad. So you need to save my life right now. You guys are the Dream Team. I Know You can do it Save my life, please. And they laughed, and they said, we're going to do everything we can Jason, and then, you know, then it was like 321. Good night.

Bill 18:14

Wow. So within a couple of hours of the bleed, you are in surgery immediately, almost immediately?

Jason Gaudette 18:23

Something like that. My wife would know the exact timeline by something like that.

Bill 18:28

Yeah. Wow. So you wake up after surgery, the hole in your head? Is some hair missing? What? What happened after that? What? What was the recovery like?

Waking after AVM surgery.

Jason Gaudette 18:39

Okay, so I remember, it was so surreal to me. I don't know, who is religious out there and who isn't. And, you know, I wasn't very much for religion myself. But I woke up. And I couldn't talk.

Well, I looked in I saw my wife and I smiled and gave her a thumbs up. And I pointed out her stomach. So she knew that I knew what was going on. So I'm and that was a real good relief, relieving sign for her. And then I, I went like this, like, give me something to write on. And they gave me a clipboard. And I wrote How did the procedure go. And they said the procedure went well. And then I wrote

I want my wife to give me a bath. Which is hilarious, because I don't I don't know where that came from. And like, I mean, I got all these wires and tubes and everything. And here, I wanted to go have a bath. And but I think the biggest key moment for me came about three or four days later when I was finally left alone at night, because my family, my mom, my dad, my sister, and my brother-in-law, all my family's just been an amazing support system for me. So I had people there all the time. So if I, if I did get afraid, or anything, you know, they were there to reassure me.

But the strange thing is I didn't get afraid. And I'm not the type of person or I wasn't the type of person before the stroke to not get afraid, you know, I would have been the guy that was like, This isn't fair, why did this happen to me, I can't believe I just had a stroke. But I wasn't at all. And I found that strange. And I had this really strong tie to angels on time, like, I was downloading songs on my phone.

And I would just want songs about angels. It was like, I just knew there was some sort of connection. I don't remember, like, I'm not going to say I had any, you know, a, you know, near-death experience or anything like that. But I just know that I wanted to listen to songs about angels. And that was that.

And then. So the first night when I had one there with me, I realized what my prognosis was. And they said to me, we believe, Jason, that you'll walk again, someday in some capacity. But we're not optimistic that you will regain much if any of your left use of your left arm and hand.

Bill 21:31

Why do they say that?

Jason Gaudette 21:32

that.

Bill 21:34

Why even say that, why did they even have the idea that they should say that I didn't get it? Whatever. Anyway,

Jason Gaudette 21:42

I know. I know.

And they're amazing doctors. I love them to death. But I mean, I think they just didn't want to give me false hope. But in the same token, I mean, it's it, you know, it makes it rough for people. But

Bill 21:54

yeah.

Jason Gaudette 21:55

So I remember going to bed trying to go to bed that night, and I was laying there and I completely paralyzed from head to toe left side. And I was just thinking like, what's my life going to be like? Am I going to be a dad, where I'm in a wheelchair, and they got to sit the baby on me and they got to, you know, watch that I don't drop the baby like, Am I going to have any form of independence? Like, what is my life going to be like?

And then I decided the only thing that I could do was to say a prayer. And I remember this prayer like it was yesterday. I say it when I do presentations in churches. And I said, Dear Lord, I'm sorry that I have abandoned you. I'm sorry that I haven't reached out to you. And thank you, sorry that I haven't asked for your help.

But I need your help. Now. I need you to be my teammate. Lord, I promise you that I will not lay in a bed and be a hypocrite and just pray for help. I promise that I will work harder than I ever had anything in my life. But I want to be a father to my child. I want to be the type of father that can run after his kid can pick up his kid.

That's what I want. Lord, please be my teammate. I promise if you help me if you touch me with your healing hands, that I will brag about what you've done for me for the rest of my life. And I started healing and I will never stop bragging. About what what what what has been done for me spiritually.

Bill 23:32

Yeah, yeah. It's awesome and spiritual. the spiritual side of Pebble really does come out after a stroke I've noticed with a lot of people certainly came out with me and not in that way that it did for you differently for me, but definitely did come out, you connect with something that you haven't connected with before in a way that you haven't done before. And it's kind of what drives you and motivates you. And whether you call it Lord, God, or something else, you know, there's definitely an awakening

Jason Gaudette 24:02

100%.

Bill 24:03

Yeah. And I think and I think it's with you like that whole promise is not only a promise to your Lord, but it's also a promise to you by the sound of things that you're going to do whatever it takes to get on the path to recovery, and then be the best that you can be and, you know, turn up for your son or your daughter or whoever's on the way and your wife and do all the things that you need to do. And it's kind of crazy, but it's a really good side effect of stroke, isn't it?

Jason's spiritual awakening

Jason Gaudette 24:40

It really is, it totally makes you look at things differently. Life in general, I think I was, you know, all with someone who was, who was looking for tomorrow, always reaching and stretching for tomorrow instead of, you know, enjoying today and being thankful for the things that I have in my life.

And yeah, I think I've also become a lot more spiritual in the universe sense of things. I never thought about the universe, Universal Power, and all of that stuff. And one thing that's pretty interesting is, when I had my cat scan when I was having the stroke, it was taken February 2, at 2200 hours and 22 minutes, it's time stamped.



And I never thought event, not at the time at all. And then I was explaining that to someone who is like a very spiritual type of person. And she said, Are you kidding me? I said, What do you mean? No. And she said, Well, those are Angel numbers. And I was like, Whoa, and she's like, look them up. And so I started looking it up and sure enough and it's all like 2's are very powerful Angel numbers.

22 is a very powerful number. 222 and quadruple two is the vibration, it's even higher. And so thinking about it, now it was February 2, which is two to 2200 hours, 22 minutes. So it's just, it's pretty crazy. So I just recently did actually got a tattoo on my back 2 2 2 2 and I got an angel Halo and some rays coming down on the 2's.

Bill 26:23

That's cool man

Jason Gaudette 26:24

pretty it means a lot.

Bill 26:26

That is cool. Yeah, that's cool. Why shouldn't it mean a lot that whatever it means to you? That's the beauty of it. It doesn't have to mean anything to anybody else. But as long as it's significant to you. That's great.

Jason Gaudette 26:37

Absolutely.

Bill 26:38

Jason, you were into business, Do you have a business or are you running a business?

Jason Gaudette 26:44

Yeah.

Bill 26:45

the day before the stroke, you're running your business. And then after the stroke, you're in the hospital. So how does that work? Now what happens with work and how do you get in touch with the people there to let them know that you can't turn up?

Jason Gaudette 27:00

I was very lucky. Again, my support system. Amazing.

My right hand, man, Steve, we work really well together. And everyone just totally picked up the pieces. From the ownership group down to, my team. Everyone picked up the pieces for me. And for three months I was out of work. And I came back I came back to work and they had done such a great job. I was so proud of everyone.

Bill 27:32

Yeah. So what were you doing for three months? Were you in rehab recovering? were you at home where we do what were you doing then?

Jason Gaudette 27:39

yeah, so I spent, I spent two months away from home. The first three weeks were at Toronto Western Hospital where that's where I had the surgery. And then I went, they sent me to St. John's rehab, and I was there for four or five weeks, five weeks. And then I went home on around it was around the beginning of April. And I took off until May 1 and I said that was just going to be time for me. And what I did was I did exercising at home anything that I could do, you know different occupational therapy exercises, physiotherapy type things.

And I read a lot. I did a lot of reading, which is something that I never really did much before the stroke and something that I find I found to be really peaceful for me.

Bill 28:35

So what did you have to learn how to reuse again? Did you have to learn how to walk again? Your arm?

What was that? Like?

Rehabilitation after AVM (Arteriovenous Malformation) Stroke

Jason Gaudette 28:44

Yeah, and completely everything from the left to the left side. You know,

those of you that follow me on Instagram can see the kind of workouts that I go through and what I do. And if you go way back in the profile, you can see the initial stages of learning to walk again. And I'm sure you know Bill that it. It's definitely not an easy task.

And you have to think about everything you do. It's one of those things walking that we take for granted. I remember watching my son learn to walk. And I was like, buddy, I know exactly what you're going through right now when I'm seeing them, you know, struggle and fall and stuff. And I'm thinking, I got it, buddy. I know what men keep going. Yeah, it was. It was a struggle.

And there are still times today people wouldn't know what probably by watching but you know, I have sometimes bad days. And you know, I got to think more about what I'm doing and, you know, turning corners walking a certain way. There's a lot more thought goes into it than I show in my body. And you know the way I operate every day.

Bill 29:54

Yeah. And what about your arm, I saw that you were able to move quite well as I can. But are there some leftover challenges with that as well?

Jason Gaudette 30:03

Ah, yeah, I would say there definitely is I got some shoulder issues at the back here that we're working on where it wants, it wants to collapse. So if I'm doing overhead lifting, it wants to collapse in. So we've been doing a lot of strengthening exercises there. And I also see do acupuncture and I work with a chiropractor, and I got I'm so blessed out of all the people around me the support

system with regards to my job, and everybody wants to help me which is amazing. So yeah, I'll also find very fine motor skills with the left hand are still a challenge.

My plan with that though, is when I feel I am where I want to be with everything else, which is, you know, fairly close, maybe it's maybe six months to a year away, then I'm going to focus on crazy amounts of attention on my hand. And it's pretty good. It's pretty good now, all things considered. I can catch, catch and throw balls with it. I show a lot of that stuff on my Instagram. You know, I can do chin-ups and all that kind of stuff. My grips really good sensation, I would say it is the worst thing. How's your sensation Bill?

Bill 31:25

Yeah, the sensation is a big issue. It's numb. And weirdly painful. I know exactly what you're saying burning and cold all at the same time.

Jason Gaudette 31:37

Yeah, I got past the cold thing. For the most part. I was lucky that I had that for a while. But that has improved a lot. But what I have is it's numb. But as much as I have, like, very poor sensation. It's hypersensitive at the same time.

Bill 31:57

Yeah, same,

Jason Gaudette 31:58

right. So when I'm trying to hold dumbbells or something, the dumbbell in the left hand feels like it's really gripping up my skin versus obviously the right just so I think that's the last thing that we're going to get back if, you know, God willing, we do.

Bill 32:19

Yeah, it seems to be the thing that causes a little bit more challenges for me as well. And the numbness of the foot causes the entire left side to tense up. And it's because it wants to help me stay up, right? And it thinks that because there are no signals going back to the brain, the brain thinks that the foot isn't touching the ground properly.

So it tenses all the muscles to give me stability and to make sure that I don't fall. And then that causes a whole bunch of muscle issues and tightness. And then that causes more pain. So I get massaged regularly to relieve the muscles and stretch

them out and give them a little bit of relief from all the tension.

Jason Gaudette 33:06

Yeah,

Bill 33:06

and then that sensation thing that you mentioned, which is hypersensitive, as well as numb. It's hyper-sensitive. So when my wife wants to be gentle and touch me on the hand, especially when I'm driving because, in Australia, we drive on the other side as they do in America. So she might reach out with a right hand and touch me on the left hand just to be you know, loving. And it'll be like, wow don't touch me. In my hand. They hurt, don't do it and she forgets

Jason Gaudette 33:35

When you get when you don't know. It's when you don't know that she's going to touch you right?

Bill 33:40

That's it? Yeah. And I'll tell her, if you're going to do that be rough about it. Just touch it rough. I don't mind if you touch it rough, don't touch it soft or gently, I can't deal with it. Unless, unless we're swapped over and she's the driver and I'm the passenger. And at that time she's driving she's not interested in touching my hand.

Jason Gaudette 33:59

One thing I know noticed Bill, like that's amazing. Know that you can right away, bang, you remember where you were you were I have trouble with that a lot.

Bill 34:09

That comes back. I'm really good in the morning. At my house. Right now in Australia, it's the morning. So around 9:30 am. So, at night in the evenings when I do podcasts, sometimes I struggle to get words out and remember what some remember, like where I was or what I had to say, or the name of a person and you see it come up in some of my podcasts where I'm struggling, and I'm stopping and I'm stuttering. So just depends on where I am on the day,

I'm seven years post-stroke, so it's getting a lot better. And things are recovering a lot more as I do more and more to be careful that I'm fueling my body and my brain in the right way. As I'm being more careful of how I'm going about doing

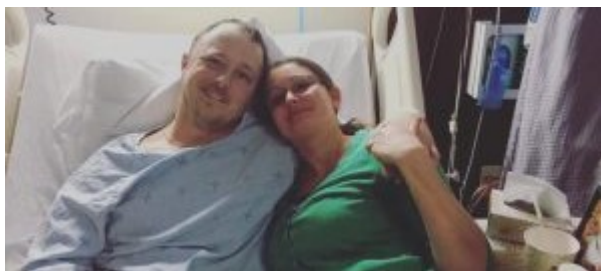
things day to day and doing the less and not tiring myself out and not putting myself in a situation where I've done too much and I'm exhausted, you know, it gets better.

But sometimes, when I've done too much, or when I haven't eaten well, or when I haven't slept well the night before, then memory is a problem, you know, I wanted to ask before we were interrupted, I wanted to ask how you are now looking back going back to the stroke. How do you deal with it all? Are you feeling a little bit traumatized by it? Have there been any other troubles emotionally and mentally that you've had to deal with?

Dealing with anger

Jason Gaudette 35:51

Um, yeah, definitely. I think one thing emotionally would be, I think I I lose my temper faster than I did before. I gotta, you know, I gotta talk to my like, I gotta remind myself always, like, if I start getting mad, like, relax, like before you react to think about what's really going on. And, you know, don't just react, especially in work, obviously, you know, I'm managing people I can't be snapping. So, that would be one thing about trauma.



A little bit if I really think back on it, but I didn't know too bad about that. My biggest fear I think is always with always with my son. Right? Like, my son says, My head hurts. I'm like, and my wife's like, relax, relax, you know, he's fine.

And, you know, I spoke to the surgeon who did my surgery and just, I guess, two years ago or something, they found out that AVM (Arteriovenous Malformation) isn't hereditary, which was like a huge relief to me, because I was worried about constantly thinking, Oh, my God, what if he has one? What if he has a stroke?

And I know I can't. I know, I can't think that way. So I try not to think that way. And, you know, I'm I don't know about you, even though they told me my AVM is removed, and you know, I'm no longer at risk. You know, it's still sometimes, you

know, I think about it, like get a little bit of numbness I think, you know, am I okay, that kind of thing?

Bill 37:39

Yeah, yeah, I do too, as well, it plays on your mind. What am I noticing? What am I feeling? Seven years down the track you're not at that stage anymore, I think, for, like you, the AVM (Arteriovenous Malformation) has been removed, and it's no chance of it bleeding again. Then what I'm feeling normally when I'm having a weird day of sensations, or something's hurting, that I haven't noticed before, is I'm just having a response to some other form of, you know, tiredness that's occurred that I haven't experienced yet. That's all it is.

So some days, you know, I find the left side, you feel the spasming and the sensations or the twitching in the muscles, so it's all different. But I'm no longer worried about oh, well, that could be another issue or another challenge. My wife goes there a little bit, though, she has a bit of a challenge with that.

So when I do something that's strange, or a pull a face that she saw, perhaps, you know, five or six years ago that she didn't like the look of, she'll say something like, what are you doing? What's wrong? And, well, nothing's wrong. I just don't know what am I doing.

She'll say you did that face. Which face was that? The one I don't like. Stop doing that, oh Okay. There's nothing wrong with me. I'm just having a moment. And I'll be right, whatever. So, she's a little bit not hyper-aware anymore. But she's a little bit more curious about what does that mean? Now? What does that look like? Oh, what is that about? You know, so what about your wife? Has she coped with it all?

Jason Gaudette 39:23

She's, she's awesome. She's really, really good with stuff like that. She's a huge, huge support. I mean, I'm just I'm so lucky. So lucky.

Bill 39:35

Yeah. Did she have to be your care at some point that she also have to take time away from work to be with you while you're away from work?

Jason Gaudette 39:45

She no, she didn't know. She was. She was she would work and, and that she

might have taken a week or two. I can't recall.

Bill 39:54

Okay.

Jason Gaudette 39:55

I know that she would go to work. And then she'd come to see me at rehab hospital right after and I do like a lot of the hospital food. So she'd go home and make food too. And then bring it the next day. And like, just go go, go, go go.

Bill 40:09

Yeah, a little while later, she started to grow a belly.

Jason Gaudette Paid tribute to the surgeon

Jason Gaudette 40:15

All Yeah. Yeah, for sure. So we actually went on the two-year anniversary, we went to Toronto Western, to see Dr. Radanovich, the guy who did the surgery. And I went, I wanted to go in and visit him. And she's like, Well, you can't just go visit the surgeon. And I'm like, Well, I'm going to try it. She goes, it doesn't work that way.

And I'm like, Okay, well, let's see. So we go into the AVM (Arteriovenous Malformation) clinic there and I said, Hi can I talk to Dr. Radonavich? And the nurse goes, do you have an appointment with him? And I said, No, I don't. But he saved my life a couple of years ago. And I'd like to shake his hand if he's here.

And I'm, she goes, he's on lunch right now. But he'll be back in probably 45 minutes. He'd love to shake your hand. Sorry, I'm just gonna move the sun has moved over now. It's following me.

Bill 41:10

Yeah, it sure is.

Jason Gaudette 41:11

So anyway, so then I said, Okay, hun, well, why don't we go down to the food court will go eat, and will come up in 45 minutes. And I had we had our son with

us, too. So we went down there. And we got our food. We went and sat down. And then she said, I forgot to get a knife. And I said, Okay, I'll go get you one. So I went, I got her a knife. I brought it back to come to the table. And then she goes, I think that's him over there.

And I look over like what? And like, this is like, maybe like four or five tables over? And I go, No, I don't think so that doesn't look like him. And she goes, Yes, it does. He has a beard now. Like, like, she was like da it's surely he just has a beard.

So that's like, okay, and she's like, so I get I stand up and she goes, What are you doing? And I go, I'm going to talk to him. She goes, he's eating with other people like, like, leave him alone. I'm like, I'm like, No, she knows I don't work that way.

So I walked right up to the table, and I go Dr Radonovich. And he just looks up at me and I go, I go Hi, it's Jason Gaudette and I start I was just about to say, you know, you did my surgery. And he, he said, You don't have to tell me I know exactlyAVM (Arteriovenous Malformation).

And he started explaining all of it. And I'm like, I'm like, I'm like, I'm like, yeah, I'm like, I'm like, Look, I said I'm sorry to you know, bother you during your lunch. But I'm here right now. I came here to see you and see the nurses and see all of the people that treated me so well when I was here.



But I want you to meet my son. And so I brought my son over and I said, Doc, because of you. This little boy has a father and we're best friends. Sorry, I'm gonna get emotional. That's, that's the most touching thing for me is like my son

is my world like I just oh man. And you have kids?

Bill 43:17

Yeah, I have two kids. Two boys. Yeah.

Jason Gaudette 43:21

Wait, what do you have kids before the stroke?

Bill 43:24

Yeah. So that would be teenagers when I had the stroke at 37. My sons were 16 and 12.

Jason Gaudette 43:33

Oh, wow. Got it taken care of early aye Bill?

Bill 43:35

Yeah, absolutely. I wasn't mucking around.

So they, they were teenagers, they were doing a little tough during that time. But yeah, every time I thought about the children and saw them, you know, it was emotional. And it's true what you say, Man, the doctors, they did an amazing job on me as well. And they saved my life. And they brought to end the trauma and all the drama because my experience happened over three years, they brought an end to the trauma and the drama.

And that was the really good thing about surgery, it finally put everything to an end. And I could get on with healing myself after surgery and then recovering. And that was the best part about it. Because I have to tell the children that, okay, it's not going to happen again. It has bled three times. But that's it's not gonna happen again. So we're good to go from here on you know?

Jason Gaudette 44:37

So you had had, like, small bleeds from it. And just what did they do during that? Yes, when that was happening.

Bill 44:43

So I had the first played in February 2012. And it was, let's just see what happens. These things bleed sometimes and then they stop. Six weeks later, it bled again, and this time was quite a large blade. And it caused quite a lot of quite a lot of neurological symptoms. So memory loss and speech issues and fatigue,

and I couldn't work, I couldn't drive all sorts of issues, and then it got better. And again, they didn't operate, they left it because they thought Well, look, it's we've been there.

In these situations, they're very rarely bleed twice, so we don't think it's going to bleed again. So we'll let it heal, and we'll see what happens and just monitor everything. So they did that. And then the blood clot that was in my head started to go away, my everything came back, and I started to feel a lot better.

And then almost three years after the first bleed, it bled again. And then my surgeon, Professor Kate Drummond said, you, you're at risk of bleeding another time. And now the odds are stacked against you. If it bleeds again, we don't know what's going to happen. And we would rather not do that. And now we need to operate.

So my AVM (Arteriovenous Malformation) was in part of the brain that was very difficult to get to, it was near the cerebellum It was about four centimeters in from the ear on the right side. So they wanted to avoid surgery if possible. But they got to that point where then they said we can avoid surgery we have to go in.

And that was a relief. For me when it happened. It was great. Because I didn't really mind what I was going to have to heal from or wake up with or any of that stuff. I just wanted it to be over. So that I didn't have to keep traumatizing everybody all the time family friends, Mom, Dad, you know, the kids. So we got to that point where

Jason Gaudette 46:36
for sure.

Bill 46:36
We put an end to it. And that was a really huge relief, you know?

Jason Gaudette 46:41
Wow, that's pretty crazy. Totally, totally different. I don't know, what would I think would be more scary. I think I would rather have it just go like me, like, boom, you're in big trouble. And you know, have it done because it's, it's knowing that you have a ticking time bomb in your head. That would be I think the worst part.

Bill 47:00

Yeah,

Jason Gaudette 47:00

I know. I know a little little girl whose mom was a member of the gym and this girl, a competitive dancer, was just a sweet girl in the mom's a sweet woman. And she started having partial seizures in high school. And they think they found out that she had an AVM (Arteriovenous Malformation). And so they needed to do surgery on an I don't know where it was, but it was a difficult spot as well.

And she was afraid that she'd never be able to dance again or anything. And they did the surgery. And she never had any symptoms. Like, they got it out. And she went back to competitive dance right away pretty much.

Bill 47:43

Yeah, so that's an amazing story,

Jason Gaudette 47:45

she's a very lucky, very lucky girl.

Bill 47:46

Brilliant story. See, we've come so far in what's possible. And we're so blessed that we live at a time where they can go in and fix us up. And compared to what we would have been if this surgery wasn't available. You know, you live with the numbness and the weird sensation and the lazy leg or you know, the inability to do 24 hours of work, work, work, work, work, you'll live with all of that now know that we've come so far we would have been. I figured that if I was 40 years ago, or maybe 50 years ago, I figured that I'd likely not be here, you know?

Jason Gaudette 48:25

Oh, yeah, you would have been done. We would have been done for sure.

Bill 48:29

Yeah.

Jason Gaudette 48:30

Unfortunately.

Bill 48:31

Yeah. So

Jason Gaudette 48:32

let me ask you something. Okay. Have you had, any seizures since your surgery?

Bill 48:38

I haven't had any stage seizures since my surgery. But they suspected that the second bleed that I had six weeks after the first one was more of a seizure than anything that bled. It was a seizure that caused a bleed. So nothing is ongoing. Very lucky like that. Have you experienced that?

Jason Gaudette 48:59

Yeah, about, about six months after.

around that. I was at the gym, I had just finished my workout when I was cooling down on the treadmill. And I felt like a cramp in my face. And I got my head got pinned in because, in a position like this, I was staring up at the roof of the gym. And I was in a trance. And I had no idea what was going on. And I remember thinking, Oh, my God, am I having a stroke again right now?

And part of me was embarrassed and was thinking, Okay, this is going to go I go away. I don't want anyone to see this. And then the other part of me was thinking, Oh, my God, I need someone to see this right away and help me. And just staring at the ceiling at the ceiling, looking at the grains in the wood and totally frozen.

I was able to stop the treadmill. And then I was just standing there. And then all of a sudden I heard someone go, Jason, are you okay? and I wanted to say, Yeah, I'm fine. But I couldn't talk. And so he and he and another guy came, got their arms around me, and started walking me to the lobby.

And with their assistance, I walked and they sat me down in a chair and I heard someone in the background will call 911. And it was all so terrible. And then all of a sudden, just like that, boom. Like, I grabbed my water bottle. I was like, Oh, that was weird. I just snapped out of it.

How Jason Gaudette Managed Seizures After AVM Stroke

Bill 50:34

And has it happened, again?

Jason Gaudette 50:35

did you know what? So then what happened? So the ambulance came, they took me down and they you know, they took my driver's license away all that may put me on Dilantin anti-seizure med. And so they put me on 300 milligrams of that. And I was good. I had two very small one's after that, which was just, it's just really weird.

I just all of a sudden my mouth would like to fill up with saliva. And I'd be in a trance. And I don't know how long it is. If it's, you know, a minute, two minutes, I don't know how long it is. But then it's just like a snap of a finger. And I'm like nothing happened. And so then from there, they upped the prescription that I'm on the up to the milligrams and touch what I've been fighting for a lot for quite a while now.

Bill 50:52

Okay, so you are still on anti-epileptic or anti-seizure medication?

Jason Gaudette 51:36

Yes. Yeah. Yeah. And I, I probably will have to be for the rest of my life. Or do I want to take CBD? And hope that that can do the same thing. Yeah. However, they told me not, unless I was willing to not drive for six months, and try it and go seizure free for six months, then I can't I can't do that. So I mean, driving is too important for me right now. I, I work. I work over an hour away from home. So yeah, it's not an option right now.

Bill 52:14

Yeah, that's something to work towards maybe?

Jason Gaudette 52:16

nothing. Yeah, that's, that's nothing big. Because the good thing for me, is I haven't had really any side effects from the medication, they tell you all the things that you're supposed to have. And one of them is one of the main ones is a lack of coordination. And you can see luckily, from my Instagram video that I, I don't have that. I mean, I have it a bit. But based on what I've, what I've gone through I I don't think it's from medication.

Bill 52:45

I reckon that with you if you've spent so much time of your life in the gym, working on things like coordination without thinking about it, you're doing that

anyway. One of the biggest, most powerful things to heal the brain is a molecule called BDNF brain-derived neurotrophic factor. And what that does is that creates a cascade of signals for the brain to create new neurons and to recover and to heal and to replace old ones. And that comes from exercise. So you're

Jason Gaudette 53:24

Oh wow, I never knew that.

Bill 53:25

Yeah, so exercise is one of the most important things that you can do when you're healing from a brain injury. And because you are, so I'll call it fit, for lack of a better word, prior to your brain injury, you're always in the gym, you're always working out, you're always lifting weight, all that stuff was constantly healing and repairing and making your brain really amazing before it became unwell.

And then your instinct to go back to the gym, because that's what you love. And that's what you do for a living, help to support your brain to heal. And one of the most supportive things that you can do is go into the gym and lift weights, even if you're not lifting, you know, super heavy weights, just lift weights, so that you're creating a little bit of resistance.

And you seem to be doing that more than most people. So I know it's not scientific of me to get to that place. But I feel like maybe what you're doing is helping the coordination, even though you're on medication.

So anyone listening who's on anti-epileptic medication and is not exercising, or anyone that's listening, who is not, who's just recovering from a brain injury and not exercising, definitely find out how much exercise you can do and do that much, even if it's 10 minutes a day because it really does support the brain mate.

Jason Gaudette 54:57

I agree and build up from there. Yeah,

Bill 55:00

yeah, just go slowly. You know,

I had somebody contact me recently to say that her husband experienced a stroke. And he's on anti-epileptic medication because he's experiencing seizures. And as a result of that, he's experiencing now some other really terrible side

effects. And you know, it's a really difficult situation, because they don't know how to get rid of those side effects. But they don't want him to have seizures. So they're constantly trying to find some kind of balance for him.

And I imagine that would be difficult for everybody. So she seemed like she was doing a little bit tough this lady. And hopefully, they'll come to some resolution to say that she was also very early on in the process with her husband, it had only been a few months. So as things develop, the healing continues to come over many years, for most people, things do settle down, they do chill out, and you get some kind of a normal, you get to some kind of a balance.

Jason Gaudette 56:07

So there's electric activity kind of thing.

Bill 56:09

Yeah. So that could be that thing for you as well. You're many years out now. So things have started to settle. And the brain still healing itself, and it will continue to heal. But we may have done a lot of that. And you're noticing less than, let's say 300 milligrams, is that a big dose or a small dose?

Jason Gaudette 56:25

I think it's a decent dose. And now I take 500. So

Bill 56:30

yeah, okay. And did they up that because you continue to have seizures, even on 300?

Jason Gaudette 56:37

Yeah, there's a certain amount you have to have within your body. I think she called it she might have called it therapeutic level. And so when I went for bloodwork to see where, where my therapy, where my therapeutic level was at, I can't remember the exact numbers Bill but I think it's like 40 to 80. The range you need to be it. And I think on 300 milligrams, I was at like 32 or something like that.

Bill 57:07

Yeah.

Jason Gaudette 57:07

So 500 milligrams bought brought me up probably into like 50 or 60, right in like the sweet spot of that zone.

Bill 57:15

So you'll be pleased to know, and everyone listening who experiences seizures, you'll be pleased to know that there is a gentleman who I'm going to interview in a few week's time, who is from Spain, who is developing a product that you put in your ear, and it predicts seizures before they happen.

Jason Gaudette 57:34

Wow.

Bill 57:35

Yeah. So it measures the brain waves. And then once it's measured the brain waves over a good period of time, and it knows what your normal is, it uses artificial intelligence to predict that as the brainwave starts to change, a seizure is about to occur, and it will send a notification to your phone and tell you to go somewhere and sit down or ask for help.

Jason Gaudette 57:58

Wow.

Bill 57:59

Yeah.

So that is an interview

Jason Gaudette 58:01

And then if you aren't gonna have a seizure, you're gonna have a panic attack for sure.

Bill 58:07

Either way, and

Jason Gaudette 58:08

No that's cool.

Bill 58:09

It's a little implantable thing that just goes in the ear, like a, I think he said, it's like a hearing aid, but it doesn't cause you to know you to hear better or anything,

it just sits there. And it just continuously measures the signals from the brain. And then it responds and they're going through now trials and testing with the US FDA, and so on, and soon might mean a year or two or whatever, but soon they will have some kind of approval from the FDA to put it into proper testing, where they can actually do a large study on humans and hopefully change the world with you know how epileptic seizures or brain seizures happened. For people, so, something to look out for. I'm so excited to bring that interview to people. I'll get that out soon.

Jason Gaudette 59:06

Yeah, I'd like to see that. That sounds very promising.

Bill 59:10

Jason, on that note, I really want to thank you for being on the podcast. Thank you for sharing your story and telling everyone what you went through. I'm so glad to hear that everything is going okay. And your little boys running around and you got to see that out.

Jason Gaudette 59:26

Oh, yeah.

Bill 59:27

And you've got the rest of your lives to teach him all the things that you did wrong that he shouldn't

Jason Gaudette 59:36

Absolutely. Thanks, Bill I'm really happy to be able to meet you finally and chat with you and share our stories. It's, it's always great talking to other survivors.

Outro 59:47

Discover how to support your recovery after a stroke. Go to RecoveryAfterStroke.com