

Changing Perspective After Stroke - Jennifer Chapman

Jennifer Chapman is recovering from an ischemic stroke which was caused by blood clots that occurred because of a vertebral artery dissection

Socials:

www.instagram.com/justcommitcoaching/

Highlights:

01:13 Introduction

03:07 Ischemic stroke caused by Vertebral Artery Dissection

09:41 Expressing emotions

13:55 Change of perspective for Jennifer Chapman

26:21 Meant to do something more

34:53 Creating the stress

40:10 Post-stroke deficits

53:53 Intimacy after Vertebral Artery Dissection

1:02:39 Nutrition after stroke

Jennifer 0:00

Having a stroke for me has changed my perspective in the sense like, yeah, I hope and still want all those things, you know, in 10, 15, 20 years. And I'm also much more focused on today.

Jennifer 0:12

You know, the moment we're in what we've got? What's our goals for tomorrow and this weekend? And so our perspective is different in that regard for sure. I think the scariest thing for me was honestly accepting this new version of me working to find acceptance in this new version of me and because you're really grieving the old you is what I've come to realize.

Jennifer 0:38

Like, this may be a better version of me, but it's taken me you know, two and a half years to get there and I still continue to do daily work on myself and my mindset, to feel confident enough in knowing that that's who I am now. This is

who I am and I am more than okay with it.

Intro 1:01

This is The Recovery After Stroke Podcast, with Bill Gasiamis, helping you navigate recovery after stroke.

Introduction Jennifer Chapman

Bill 1:13

Bill from recoveryafterstroke.com. This is Episode 129. And my guest today is Jennifer Chapman. Jennifer didn't know that she had a vertebral artery dissection that unfortunately created multiple blood clots, which caused an ischemic stroke.

Bill 1:29

In this interview, we discuss how her perspective on life has changed since the stroke. Now before we get started, if you have ever wondered what else I can do to help you with your stroke recovery, you should know that you can now get recovery after stroke coaching right from the comfort of your own home.

Bill 1:44

I too am a three-time stroke survivor and I have built for you what I was missing. When I was sent home from hospital in the hope that you don't have to do stroke recovery as tough as I did.

Bill 1:55

Support packages give you access to a variety of tools 24-hours a day, 7 days a week so that you can also work on other areas of stroke recovery, like adjusting to your new normal, or even managing the grief that you may be feeling for your former self.

Bill 2:10

With talent support available from \$8.50 per week, or recovery after stroke support packages and bring stroke recovery to you in the comfort of your own home. To try out recovery after stroke support and see if it is right for you, you will get the first seven days free, as well as a 30-day money-back guarantee no questions asked.

Bill 2:30

As a bonus, you will also get to face to face zoom support calls with myself to help take your recovery to the next level. Go to recoveryafterstroke.com/support to sign up. It won't cost you anything for the first seven days. And you will get a full refund. If you are not happy after 30 days. You have nothing to lose, and everything's again. And now it's on with the show. Jennifer Chapman, welcome to the podcast.

Jennifer 2:57

Thank you so much for having me.

Bill 3:00

My pleasure. Thank you for being here. Tell me a little bit about what happened to you.

Ischemic stroke caused by Vertebral Artery Dissection

Bill 3:07

Yeah, so I spent my career in corporate sales. And was in this position, you know, hustling and grinding every day and feeling the stress, but I guess I didn't know how much stress I put myself under. I was switching roles and positions within the company. And literally, the next morning I woke up and was prepared to start my new role and was getting ready to leave for the day and felt overwhelmingly dizzy out of nowhere.

Jennifer 3:46

Who hit you know very fast and was sweating profusely through my clothes and was like this can't be right. So I lay down for a minute and it didn't subside. So I called a family member and told her I didn't feel right. And she said you don't sound right. And I could tell that I was starting to struggle to swallow.

Jennifer 4:06

And my voice was changing. So I was humble myself. So I called 911. And the ambulance came to get me and I got to the hospital very quickly. I mean, within 15, 20 minutes, but unfortunately, it took them gosh, probably 12 hours for them to determine that I had suffered a stroke at 34.

Jennifer 4:28

And I think it was because maybe of my age that was not the first thing on their list to consider. I think they thought it was vertigo. So I think that time was crucial right? looking back.

Bill 4:39

Yeah, absolutely crucial. So what kind of stroke was it?

Bill 4:42

It was an ischemic stroke. So I had a clot but they didn't find that right away like I said, so it took quite a few hours and once the second MRI showed a picture. It had happened in three different places in my brain.

Bill 5:03

So three different clots in three different locations?

Jennifer 5:08

Correct.

Bill 5:09

Wow. And do they know what was the underlying cause of the clots?

Bill 5:16

So Bill, it took 18 months for them to figure out how this happened. And in between that time, they ruled out a lot of things. You know, I wore heart monitor to make sure there was nothing, no heart issues.

Jennifer 5:30

I had gone to a hematologist, for any blood disorders, they took quite a bit from me that day, but nothing really stood out to them as far as why would cause a stroke. So I went to several specialists throughout that 18 months, but we finally did another CT scan and an angiogram.

Jennifer 5:49

And that's where they determined that I had a dissection in the artery in the back of my neck. It was so small, they didn't see it for clearly quite some time, but and then over time it had scarred over and is healing on its own. So I didn't have to have surgery or anything. But yeah, talk about anxiety and fear until they found the answer.

Bill 6:13

Yeah, so anxiety that it's gonna happen again, fear that you might die. What was the what were the emotions around that?

Bill 6:20

Yeah, it was emotional instability, for sure. I mean, I was crying every day, questioning every single move that I make in every pain that I felt. If I even remotely felt dizzy for a split second, right? Or if I stood up too fast and fell off.

Jennifer 6:40

It's like, is this is this another one? Is this going to happen again? And is it going to be worse this time? Am I going to be able to recover and heal like I did this time? I mean, all those questions run through your head all the time.

Bill 6:53

And who's living with you or you're living on your own? Or do you have family around you?

Bill 6:57

I am married to my husband of 11 years. We have no children. We do have a chocolate lab who has our child. So he has really been a tremendous support system for me, you know, he wasn't home that day. But he was at the hospital before I could even get there. And it's stayed with me by my side every single day since so.

Jennifer 7:22

So you know how you're experiencing anxiety and fear around the possibility that there might be another stroke. How's your husband coping with that? What is he experiencing? Or is he different from you in the way that he handles these types of situations?

Bill 7:39

He's completely different than me. And I think, I think it's hard. I can only imagine how hard it is. And maybe it's different from men to women, you know, as the caregivers as the caretakers, how they handle it, I think that if it were to happen to him, I would be I would still feel anxiety and stress with him and for him.

Jennifer 8:01

But because it was the opposite way. And it happened to me, he came across as

an extremely strong person and didn't show any, you know, fear or weakness or stress or anxiety. If he did, I wouldn't know it.

Jennifer 8:22

And I know he did within the hospital this first couple of days. You know, my friends and family expressed that to me, but I never saw it. I was never aware of any emotion that said that otherwise, aside from he's got me he's gonna take care of me.

Bill 8:38

Yeah, caring, how many years ago was it?

Bill 8:44

I will have my fourth anniversary at the end of March this year. So March 30, of 2017.

Jennifer 8:53

Okay, so have you had a chance to speak to your husband about it since? Have you maybe gone down there and had that conversation with him to actually see what was happening, what the underlying concerns that were even though he was behaving like a duck, call and calm and collected on the water? Probably doing some stuff underneath that you couldn't see?

Bill 9:19

Yes, we've talked about it. But he's not one to get overly deep on his feelings and emotions. You know, he still comes across it's pretty surface level. I know he was concerned and worried and I heard that from his parents and his mom was an extreme support system to me as well.

Expressing emotions

Jennifer 9:41

So I'm sure she had those conversations with him pretty early on too to see how he was coping and dealing But since then, he just shows me that he cares and is concerned versus talking about it.

Bill 9:57

Yeah, that's a typical man thing and I find.

Bill 10:01

Yeah I don't think I'm saying anything surprising to anybody.

Bill 10:04

No, I keep raising it though, because I think if men do listen to this podcast, I just want to raise it as a point of, we know what you do we know what you're like, we know what you're not expressing and not sharing.

Bill 10:16

And they might be the things that you need to share and express at some point in time in your life. And you don't have to do it now. Just do it when you're ready. But when the time comes, don't then.

Bill 10:26

And I say that, as a man who went through stroke, the first episode was nearly nine years ago, in February, it'll be nine years. And I struggled a lot with the emotional side of it, and expressing myself and being more willing to go to those, you know, deep emotional places that a lot of work needed to be done, there was a lot of work.

Bill 10:55

So then finding myself being a little bit strange in a group of other men who wouldn't necessarily go there. And that it was odd that I was going in there, and I was the odd one out, but they appreciated when I spoke about it, they just didn't engage in the conversation.

Jennifer 11:17

I believe that,

Jennifer 11:18

Yeah, and then, and then just seeing how my brother reacted as opposed to how I reacted, and then how my dad reacted. So it's a very interesting conversation. Most of the people who approached me to being a podcast are not men, it's women.

Bill 11:34

And most of the people who are prepared to have coaching are not men, they are women and most by my little basic version of the way that I sort of judge a situation or things that are going on, you started to show a pattern of men tend to

just sit in the background and process things by themselves and do the stiff upper lip kind of thing.

Bill 11:59

So it's good that he's got his way of doing it. And that's really important, too, that you appreciate that it's his way. And his way, it doesn't have to be your way, or it doesn't have to be the way that somebody else does it.

Bill 12:12

100% That's right. And it's taken, you know, like I said, we've been together 13 years, it's taken time for me to understand how he does cope and deal with certain things versus the way I do with with a lot of things in life, right? Serious situations, not so serious, we handle things completely different. And it's understanding and accepting how each other handles it. And being okay with it.

Bill 12:40

Yeah. So you guys were quite young when you got married? How old were you when you married?

Jennifer 12:47

27.

Bill 12:49

Okay, that's not that young. It seems like you said you guys were together for 11 years or longer?

Bill 12:58

I got married at 27. So we've been married 11 years been together 13.

Jennifer 13:05

Okay, so at 24 you guys got together, was there any idea of planning about the future about how your life was going to pan out and what you guys were going to be doing together and achieve and all that kind of thing?

Bill 13:27

Yes, we definitely had created a vision together. As far as what we wanted our lives to look like. And we knew early on, children was not in our by choice, we decided not to have kids, we were both just on the same page with that and wanted to enjoy our lives and, work until we could, you know, retire and enjoy

travel and the things we wanted to do when we wanted to do them.

Change of perspective for Jennifer Chapman

Bill 13:55

Had stroke, interrupt your plan for the future? What does it do at the time when it happens in that first, say, 12 months? And now that some time has passed? How has that changed again?

Bill 14:12

Yeah, great question. I think that first year for both him and I, I know but speaking for me in recovery, like my brain didn't process any of that. It was much more short term. Like you I'm just focusing on, you know, rehabbing and recovering and getting better every day.

Jennifer 14:34

It was definitely day by day for me for the first year. And I think that's how he thought of it. But he's always been much more of a long term goal oriented person, whereas having a stroke for me has changed my perspective, in the sense like, yeah, I hope and still want all those things, you know, in 10 15 20 years, but I'm also much more focused on that today. You know, the moment we're in, what do we've got? What's our goals for tomorrow and this weekend? And so I our perspective is different in that regard for sure.

Jennifer 15:09

When I had the first episode, the first bleed in the head, I didn't consider that my life was going to be potentially lost. I didn't think about that, then. Then six weeks later, I had another bleed. And that was the one that made me feel like, you know, the next one could be the last one.

Bill 15:36

That was one of the scariest things for me is that I wouldn't have enough time with my family to tell them what I needed to tell them to make things right to be a better version of myself all that stuff. And I considered my mortality for the first time. What was the scariest thing for you?

Bill 15:57

That's a good question. I think the scariest thing for me was honestly accepting this new version of me. Really, it was working with a life coach that I hired about

18 months after I tried therapy, and that there's a place for therapy, no doubt about it, it just didn't work for me.

Jennifer 16:26

So I heal through working with a life coach, and working to find acceptance in this new version of me and because you're really grieving the old you is what I've come to realize, right? Like, this may be a better version of me, but it's taken me you know, two and a half years to, to get there. And I still continue to do daily work on myself and my mindset, to feel confident enough in knowing that that's who I am now, this is who I am, and I am more than okay with it.

Intro 17:01

If you've had a stroke, and you're in recovery, you'll know what a scary and confusing time and 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.

Intro 17:19

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're finding yourself in that situation, stop worrying, and head to recoveryafterstroke.com where you can download a guide that will help you.

Intro 17:41

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

Jennifer 18:15

That was the scary part.

Jennifer 18:17

Yeah, that's an interesting scary part. And you know, most people go into very different places when they have a stroke. But they're scared about so many other things. And that's okay.

Bill 18:26

For me. I like what you said about the therapy side of it, and what got you through. So I'm a coach. And I've been a coach for probably 10 years, and I've coached people in a whole bunch of different areas in their life. It seems like regardless of why they are attracted to me, they've all got the same problems.

Bill 18:44

But I was going to therapy for 20 odd years, 21, 22 years. And at the beginning, it was useful. And then after a few years, I kind of got this is getting old, I'm getting annoyed with this. It's not working, I'm not solving my problems.

Bill 19:01

What I didn't realize was there was a level of responsibility that I needed to take to solve my own problems. Me going to therapy and just talking about it forever, wasn't going to achieve anything. And my therapist was an amazing lady. And she was encouraging me to do all those things.

Bill 19:18

And the reason I continue to go after that first initial block, and that hurdle in the first few years of therapy was because I had great rapport with her. And I could go to her and just have one of those real amazing conversations that I couldn't have with anyone else.

Bill 19:39

That wasn't about fixing me it wasn't about making me better or any of that stuff. It was just about me going and not being judged and having a conversation and sharing myself. And then she had no reason to question what I was saying. And she made me feel validated that how I was thinking and the things that I was doing.

Bill 20:07

Were okay, and they were on the right track. So then I found a life coach who said, what you need to do is unravel the path towards achieving that particular goal that you want to achieve.

Bill 20:22

What is that path? What does it look like, and what's stopping you from getting there? So combined with the therapist, me going then, and just expressing myself and finding somebody who wouldn't judge me and who would appreciate me for

me, meant that I could free myself up from not having like minded people around me, and then I could seek them out by going down this other path of coaching and overcoming my lack of skills.

Bill 20:51

And that's what my biggest concern was, when I was growing up, it was I didn't have the skills to achieve these goals. And I thought it was too difficult for me to do. So I love how you also got to that point with therapy being useful for one part of your life? And then actually, am I saying it correctly, you needed coaching to get you through the path or the process to wherever it was that you want it to go?

Bill 21:20

Correct, that's exactly right. I felt like therapy. You're diving into your past. And like you said talking about it, which can very easily become just mentally and emotionally draining just talking about it every time. But with coaching, it was like, let's accept the current situation. Let's understand it. And let's learn how to move forward. And I'm like, yes, that resonated with me. That's exactly what I wanted to do.

Jennifer 21:50

That it. And what's the future about, and how do we get to the future version of you, which is the one that has a new career potentially, or the one that has had some amazing experiences that you never thought you might have like traveling? Or playing, you know, a part in some kind of a theatre production, whatever it is that your heart desires, that gets you moving.

Bill 22:15

That's exactly right. It was an incredible experience working with her to define what this new version of me is going to look like. And not only that, rebuilding my confidence in myself, I was really struggling with, with the belief in myself that I am capable of whatever it is that I want to do.

Jennifer 22:41

And I felt like she believed in me before I could believe in myself. So I was really struggling to wrap my head around. You know, taking these big leaps that before I knew I could take without a doubt. But now what's stopping me? No one else but me that was it. Getting out of my own head.

Jennifer 23:03

Yeah, pretty much. And taking action, you know, gutsy action to move forward, and finally connect with that person, finally do something about that thing. And finally, you know, risk of being rejected, finally, overcoming your monkey brain. And the ideas that it's thrown out there about why it's so difficult or what's not possible.

Bill 23:27

What labels had you given yourself before the stroke. So I was a guy who was self employed, who worked 24 hours a day, seven day a week. And even if I wasn't at work, I was always thinking about work or doing something that was related to work. And I never had enough time for myself.

Bill 23:46

And I always whinged about that and always complained about that. And I thought that it was the world that was at fault. That was the kind of way that I labeled myself. And I quickly realized that that version of me wasn't going to help me in my recovery. What kind of labels have you given yourself that had to shift?

Bill 24:08

That I was more than just a sales rep. And it was a massive organization, but knowing that I was more than the title of a sales rep. And that was me giving myself that right. No one else did. I mean, anybody did, I didn't care about that. I had the support before for sure.

Jennifer 24:34

But in wanting to stand on my own two feet, aside from being a wife to my husband, that had a great job, no doubt about it, but I was at that point, establishing myself as a career, you know, sales professional. So that's been a total shift for me. Now knowing How much more I am giving myself that value and that worth as a person.

Jennifer 25:06

Yeah. When stroke happened did you find that that conversation happened quickly? Or did it take some time before you had to go back and reassess.

Jennifer 25:24

Not a lot of conversations happened too quickly. After, to be honest, it was much more about just the physical action that I had to take to work on myself from a physical recovery standpoint for the first 6, 7, 8 months. And even before that, I

rushed back to work, I was asked, you know, I came back, so I wanted to feel normal, and think that I could just jump right into where I left off and continue to meet those high results and expectations.

Jennifer 25:59

And they weren't asking that of me. That's what I wanted out of myself. But it, you know, after a few months of thinking, I was back to normal, it wasn't, you know, is figuring out having this conversation of, okay, you're no longer fulfilled selling this or that.

Meant to do something more

Jennifer Chapman Overcomes Tragedy and Supports for Stroke Survivors

by Ryann Pierre — September 7, 2020



Jennifer 26:20

What, do you want to do? What is your sole purpose telling you to do here? And that's when I, had conversations with leadership team, and they were super supportive with me. And we're willing to make something work if we can make it work as far as being in a role. But I knew I had to step away because I knew I was meant to do something more.

Bill 26:44

Yeah, I like it. I was a bit thick. Like, I didn't realize that I was meant to do something more. I just realized that I had to stop doing things the way that I was doing them, because obviously, it wasn't working. And I wasn't enjoying my life. I didn't. Isn't it weird that I didn't even realize that I wasn't enjoying my life, I just was really angry about it. And used to take it out on everybody else interesting.

Jennifer 27:13

I had no idea. So my coaching is what helped me understand that there's some joy to be had, at some point down the road somewhere. And again, it wasn't an

awareness that I had, it was just a path that I was following, because somebody was guiding me beautifully down that down to that path.

Bill 27:35

And I remember getting to about 2000, and, you know, 15, or something like that, which was just a few months after. Maybe it was a year after brain surgery or a few months after brain surgery. And I thought, why don't I just do a podcast where I interview people and talk about stroke because I think what I was lacking was the connecting with people that will like me now.

Bill 28:05

And that I understood and who really understood me. And I had that podcast going for about 20 or so episodes. And I hadn't interviewed many stroke survivors. And while I was doing the podcast, I was just interviewing people who are recovering from different ailments and different health issues.

Bill 28:28

And I related to them to an extent. And we had some amazing conversations, and I called it the transit lounge podcast. And it took me about a year or more to do those 20 episodes. And then as I continued to understand what podcasting was about, and why I was doing it.

Bill 28:47

It happened I reckon two years later, where the light bulb moment occurred when I realized that what I'm doing is actually helping me in my recovery, and at the same time is helping other people. And I might, could it be possible that that's part of my purpose in life is to really connect with people who I can help, and then also have those people help me in this really loving two way relationship that just came.

Bill 29:19

And if I had to think about that, and try and find a way to get to that, I don't think I would have got there. But the fact that I was just doing and being and enjoying this process is what made me reflect four or five years later and go well, that's one of the best things I ever did was just do something even though I don't know what it's going to mean in four or five years.

Bill 29:46

And even though I don't have to commit to it, just do it and see what comes of it.

Do you find yourself being down the road and then turning back and going Well, if I never did that thing or if I never had that experience that never would have led to the next one, and then never would lead to the next one, and then I wouldn't have had this amazing 12 months of growth or expanse, or whatever, is that familiar?

Bill 30:16

It's amazing to think that if I, if I hadn't had the stroke, I would like to think that I was still at that company, you know, thriving and, you know, being a successful leader at that company and have worked my way up, you know, but almost four years ago, my life completely changed.

Jennifer 30:38

And working with my coach to realize this happened for me, not to me, that this happened for a reason and really understanding what the reason is, and why? You know, looking back, I have no other thing to say, but that I'm thankful that it happened because it's brought me to where I am now.

Jennifer 31:02

And it's brought me to what I look forward to doing moving forward, which is serving others and being able to coach, others that are still stuck. They don't necessarily have to be stroke survivors, obviously, although that is who I resonate the most with. But I feel like there's lots of people out there that are looking to overcome these mental and emotional challenges after a life changing event or trauma.

Jennifer 31:26

And they're just trying to figure out how do I accept and adapt and embrace the new me? So yeah, it's crazy that it's taken time, and that someone can say they're thankful, but it's truly a blessing.

Jennifer 31:42

I say the same thing, and many people can't yet say that. And that's okay. I also relate to what you're saying about, you know, helping others and supporting other people. What I realized was that stroke survivors had the same problems before stroke that they have after stroke.

Bill 32:05

But now they might have a few extra ones that are, actually because of the stroke.

So when you're coaching a stroke survivor, it's not the stroke, that you're coaching them to overcome or get over, you're actually coaching them to overcome the shit that came before that, that has now reared its ugly head again, and in a bigger and more urgent way, because now life for me, it could be over, or, oh, my God, I haven't done all this stuff that I was supposed to have done, because I made all these ridiculous excuses.

Bill 32:39

And now look at me now. Now I can't walk, I can't use one of my arms. And here I am, with extra problems. And now I really have problems. Whereas before, it was just in my head, it was just stories. So when I come across somebody who needs help, stroke is my platform.

Bill 33:02

It's what I use to connect with people. If I didn't use stroke, I wouldn't know how to connect with you. We wouldn't be able to connect. Right? So now I use this weird word I call a stroke. And now all of a sudden, people connect. Now with other people, it might be a hobby, they might be into drone photography.

Bill 33:25

And what they find from drone photography isn't other people who know how to take photos with a drone. It's somebody who they can relate to who shares their pain, their passion, their ideas, their creativity. And the drone is just this weird thing that we squeeze in the middle to make a connection.

Jennifer 33:45

Right? Yeah, I totally understand that. And I'm on the same page with you on that. I feel like the problems that I thought I had before that I thought were big deal. aren't that big a deal anymore. That's what I've come to realize. Like, really I feel like I'm so hyper aware of everything now.

Jennifer 34:10

Good, bad or indifferent. But what problems am I really sweating here? Is it was I really sweating over you know, traffic that day, which used to, you know, I could really have gotten worked up about some thoughts on the road all the time, like, now, it'll be okay. I'll get to where I need to get what I need to get there.

Jennifer 34:32

You know, like, really trying to manage the stress level. And making sure I'm in a

calm state of mind as much as I possibly can be because the stress isn't worth it. It's really trying to how to manage that right? It's the the mental health piece. That's so crucial in recovery.

Creating stress



Bill 34:53

Do you feel like the stress is something that you created bad habits around and weren't aware of it. So the reason I asked that is because I truly feel like my stress when I create stress it's, again, I just said it like I create it. I know there's an environment around me. I create it, do you feel like you fell into some bad habits just because of life? Or I don't know what not paying attention enough.

Jennifer 35:25

So yeah, growing up, always, I've been an extremely competitive person. So whether that was playing sports growing up, or any type of competition, you know, at work, you know, since I'm in sales, there's always competition to hit numbers. And because I was a competitive person and cared so much about winning, that was the stress I put on myself.

Jennifer 35:54

You know, thinking that I was competing with other people, and I would put these ridiculous expectations on myself. Yeah, there was corporate expectations. But ultimately, if I was going to win, I was going to do what I you know what it took, but I put all that on myself.

Jennifer 36:11

Which isn't worth it at the end, to feel the way you're gonna feel to try and win what? I mean. So it was just that shift in mindset for me, because the competitive side of me helped in recovery, I will tell you, because I was trying to be what I accomplished the day before, and an athlete and competitor me, that's where I thrive, no doubt about it. But yeah, from a mindset standpoint, taking that level, you know, knowing how to manage and take that level of stress down because like you said, we put it on ourselves.

Bill 36:50

As an athlete, if you're preparing for an event, and you're stressed how well are you going to achieve that? in that event?

Bill 37:03

It depends. It depends on where I grew up, tennis was my sport of choice.

Bill 37:10

So if you're stressed about what happened in the car park, or what happened on the way to the game, how much is that gonna help you with the game? If you don't let that go?

Bill 37:24

Yeah, typically not well, I'm going to beat myself before they're gonna beat me. Like, it's what I've done, right? My preparation, what I've put in my head before I stepped out onto the court. You know, if I was in a good headspace, it would go so much better. Looking back, you know, being able to process all this now. It's like, oh, man, I got myself into all kinds of trouble. And I did a lot of damage to myself, let alone the competition that was out there.

Jennifer 37:56

And isn't it interesting that as somebody who had been coached for a long time, in tennis, your you knew that when you're stressed, and you take that onto a game onto a court into a game, that that's going to impact your performance? There's so many people who participate in sports that know that yet, we don't do that. In life, we don't have that conversation.

Bill 38:23

We don't know that about our life. So we'll leave the stress behind when we go on the court and have a great game. And we'll say yeah, I was in the zone and everything went right for me today. And I was feeling great, etc.

Bill 38:35

And, you know, all the steps that you took to get to that point to be great in the game, you probably meditated or ate well, the day before, you probably did all these amazing things. You had your preparation, and your process. And then you go into regular life and you've got no process, no preparation, nothing just just turn up and use or just play out all the crazy habits.

Jennifer 39:01

That's right. It's, incredible. You know, what can happen in your life if you just know how to properly take care of yourself in all aspects mentally, emotionally, physically, spiritually, all the things, if you if you have if you can put a routine in place, you know, every day, every morning, whatever that looks like knowing to get good regular sleep at night.

Jennifer 39:30

Eating great meals, drinking a lot of you know enough water, getting your your 30 minutes of exercise. Maybe practice gratitude journaling, which I didn't do until after all this had occurred. But what that can do to shift your mindset as well but just to be in a good headspace. How much more productive and successful you'll be that day versus the self sabotage you can do to yourself.

Bill 39:55

So good. What was the hardest thing you've had to overcome? So far, so whether that be cognitive or physical, what are some of the things that you've had to overcome, that were caused by the stroke?

Post-stroke deficits

Bill 40:10

Yeah, so I'm blessed physically, that if you saw me on the street, no one would ever know, I've had a stroke. So I am well aware of that, and incredibly thankful that I was able to overcome the physical challenges, the biggest deficit that I have, that no one can see is that I lost lost my left peripheral vision.

Jennifer 40:35

So I don't have about 40% of my vision. So I don't mean there's like a straight line looking versus the left side of my, my body over here. So I adapted that every day, I've gotten better, right over the over the years of knowing that's not going to

change, there's nothing we can do about that. I'm blessed that I got my license back a few months later.

Jennifer 40:57

And I'm able to drive where I know, there's so many people that you know, they, they lose that freedom. But that's still a challenge. And it can still mess with you mentally, to know that you don't have 40% of your vision. And then the other deficit that I had to overcome, which was also extremely challenging, that no one can see is my vocal cord was paralyzed.

Jennifer 41:23

So not only did I have the speech therapy to get the strength in my voice back, but it affects my ability to breathe. So it doesn't affect it on a daily basis, or when I'm sleeping or anything, but as a girl that used to do boot camp style workouts five to six days a week, and push myself to the point of exhaustion and exertion every day, and I couldn't leave the gym without you know, being completely drenched in sweat and that was a de stressor for me, right?

Jennifer 41:53

I can't do that now. Because I have to be able to catch my breath. So I can't really do any cardio or anything. And so I'll get winded extremely easily. So overcoming that not only physically figuring out another way to work out, but as a de stressor, how am I going to de stress mentally, knowing I have to change such a big part of my life. So that's been that was challenging. I found a new way and I love it, but it took some time.

Bill 42:23

So what's the new way?

Bill 42:27

Pilates is my passion. I never would have considered that before not judging anybody that did it. It just didn't seem like the type of workout for me that was going to accomplish what I wanted to accomplish. But now.

Bill 42:41

Let's face it, it seems weird Pilates whatever.

Bill 42:46

Yeah, what are we doing? Are we stretching and doing abs? No, it's hard every

single time.

Bill 42:55

But it's amazing I know. So Pilates. So you do that a few times?

Jennifer 43:03

Oh, yeah. I probably six days a week. I take one day off.

Bill 43:08

I can see you don't do things by yeah.

Bill 43:14

I love it. It's continued healing and therapy too to do Pilates. Right. I mean, it's, I'm consistently working on my balance still, and breathing, and, you know, just stretching. And it really is such a great form of exercise and therapy for me.

Bill 43:36

So have you tried to play tennis again?

Bill 43:42

Not really. I have not stepped on a court in a while. And here's the thing, I wouldn't want to get out there and get frustrated. Because I know I'm not even close to where I was before. So that's the competitive side of me knowing like, if I'm not gonna be able to, you know, do what I used to be able to do on the court. I'm good, I'll walk away.

Jennifer 44:08

All right, that's your challenge, your challenge is to put that out of your head and just go on to the court and just be there. And even if you can't win a game, because you're not going to actually be there to play a game, you're just going to have a hit. That's what my challenge for you is just go back to the tennis court, and just feel it and see what it's like. And if you don't like it, that's fine. But you might be like.

Jennifer 44:31

It would feel good I know.

Bill 44:33

Yeah. Give yourself that let yourself do that. And it doesn't matter that you aren't going to be as competitive as you were before because you're trying to evolve

from being that kind of person anyway, you don't really want to be in that space because that's not the space that you're in. Now you're in a different space.

Jennifer 44:53

I can do that.

Jennifer 44:57

It's not for me to tell you what to do or give advice unsolicited especially, but it just to me, it sounds like man like that's what you must do, for me and I say that because there'll be a lot of other stroke survivors going, ah, I couldn't possibly go back and try that again or do that again.

Bill 45:15

And for me it was riding a bike. And I got on a bike and my balance is affected. And as a result, you know, I would feel a bit less sturdy on my left side. And then also I can't feel my left side of my body. It's very numb, and that meant that my foot wouldn't.

Jennifer 45:35

That's how my right side is.

Bill 45:37

Yeah, right. Okay, so my foot on the pedal would fall off the pedal, and the pedal would scrape my shins. And, and it was a real difficult thing for me to ride a bike and I stopped doing it for about four years, I got sick of it, and I couldn't do it anymore. Because it would be very tiring to turn the pedal, my leg would fatigue.

Bill 46:00

So then I discovered electric bikes. And I realized that when I get on an electric bike, and pedal, my foot doesn't fatigue as much. And I don't ride my bike for, you know, heaps and heaps of time or for very long distances, I just do it so that I can get a feel for this freedom and sense of, you know, the wind rushing by your head, and all that kind of stuff that I used to get when I was a kid.

Bill 46:30

So after four years of refusing to get back on a bike, because it was too scary or too dangerous, I found the solution and I got back on it. And now I do it, maybe two or three times a month for a couple of hours. And it just brings me so much joy. And it's a very gentle form of exercise as well.

Bill 46:50

Because like you, I really am not going to run again, I'm not going to do very strenuous type of exercises like I used to do before. So this is just a lovely way. And it took me four years to overcome it and find a solution to it. But most of the four years was made just overcoming my concern with it and my fear.

Jennifer 47:10

Exactly.

Bill 47:13

So you experience it. You experienced right side numbness. Is that constant? Does it get worse when you're tired at the end of the day?

Bill 47:23

It does. And that's right, that's another thing that people don't see. Unless you tell them is my right side feels completely different than my left. Not that I have necessarily weakness, but the sensitivity to like hot and cold.

Jennifer 47:39

I don't really feel that on my right side. Like I do my left. It's like literally aligned directly down my body. My right leg is overly sensitive. It's tingly. And depending on the temperature or fatigue, it gets worse. I mean, there's days that it's, it's definitely more tender than others.

Bill 47:57

I try to explain that to people. And there's only one way that I can it's like, do I tell them? Have you ever sat on your leg and it's gone numb, and it feels tingly? And they say yes, I say well, that's how my entire left side feels. And it starts from the middle of my head to there.

Bill 48:17

And, all the way down. And to bring a bit of humor into it. I tell them that it is halfway between every single part of my body you get what I'm going you get what I mean yeah, guys? So yeah, they find it bizarre because I explained to them it's you know, every part of my body, just get that in your head. You know?

Bill 48:45

And I gotta ask on your on your left side, your left side is tingly?

Bill 48:52

Yeah.

Jennifer 48:53

Does it affect the right side of your brain. I feel like I'll feel tingly on my left side of my head. But it's the right side of my body.

Jennifer 49:03

Yeah, so exactly that so my bleed was on the right side and the surgery was on the right side. And the left side feels strange and bizarre, although it's the healthy, quote-unquote, the healthy side or the good side of me. It's the one that is always tight and stiff.

Bill 49:22

And always overcompensating, my muscles are always contracting in weird ways. So the right side feels normal. And sometimes I have the days where I do the comparison. So do you ever do those days where you're going? Oh, shit, my left side feels weird again.

Bill 49:40

I do that and that frustrates me sometimes. Because sometimes I feel and I wish like I wish it wasn't doing that right now. I wish I was just feeling one. Did you get that you have that experience?

Bill 49:56

Totally. I definitely do. I think the part I worry about is feeling sensations in my head. On my left side, I'll feel sensations and I don't know how else to explain it. Except I don't feel tingly or sensitive on the inside.

Jennifer 50:15

And it's being reassured that that's just the new, you know, it's your new normal. Like, I met with my neurologist last week, actually, who I enjoy meeting with, and she's taking good care of me these last almost four years. But it's like, if you don't have any concerns, I guess that I need to, you know, be okay with it.

Jennifer 50:40

But it's, yeah, there's days where I'm like, what, what is that? Do I need to be worried I need to call somebody, I need to just let it be, you know, meditate, calm down. And know that I'm okay.

Bill 50:52

That's fair, because I had that conversation around the four or five year mark as well. And my neurologist said, you're good to go. And whatever you're feeling or feeling or whatever you've got, you've got, but you're good to go. As far as your head is concerned.

Bill 51:11

But I remember even about 18 months ago, I was in the hospital concerned about stroke. So I've been I've been out of this, you know, risk category for nearly four years now, maybe nearly almost five years. And I had this really strange day where I felt really off.

Bill 51:36

And my head was feeling really terrible. And at the same time, I have, do you see this thing on my forehead on my eye here that a little bump? So that's a blood vessel that has expanded or swollen or something's happened to it. And that happened at the same time as this really bizarre, strange headache.

Bill 52:04

So, for me, it wasn't silly to go to my hospital where I had been treated and had surgery and say I know it's probably nothing but I'd rather check it out, than go worrying about it and thinking about it. And it turned out of course to be nothing.

Bill 52:24

But when I went there, they took it seriously. They said to me, Look, we're glad you're here would rather you come and let's check it out and let's get to the bottom of it. And then I went home feeling relieved, and I let the headache just relax. And that was that.

Bill 52:39

Yeah. Peace of mind is everything.

Bill 52:43

Yeah, it really is. And, I don't think I'm gonna go through the rest of my life ignoring a headache anymore.

Bill 52:56

And I still battle those too, I still get headaches. And that's what I met with her about recently, I got headaches before the stroke. I mean, I've had them since

college. I've usually been able to manage them if I got a migraine or something with a medicine. But after the stroke, I couldn't take that medicine anymore.

Jennifer 53:14

They said it affected your blood vessels and things so it was a risk to take it. So these last three and a half years. It's trying to find a medicine that's going to work as well as the one that worked every single time before which we've yet to find the ideal medication, I take a couple preventatives and everything, but I'm getting ready to start something new here soon to see if we can keep them under control.

Jennifer 53:39

Which I appreciate her so much and never giving up and always willing to try new things with me to kind of make sure I'm in a least amount of pain as possible and to have as much peace of mind as I can every day.

Intimacy after Vertebral Artery Dissection

Jennifer 53:53

Yeah, it's important with regards to if it's okay, can we go for a little bit of time, to intimacy, and not on any details or anything like that. But for me, as a male, it was really, really important that I became intimate with my wife again, as quickly as possible.

Bill 54:14

And it was not obviously able to happen for a period of time at least six weeks. My doctor specifically told me because it was one of the first things that I specifically asked, and they said to me for at least six weeks because you've had a bleed and you've got potentially still a blood vessel that hasn't healed properly.

Bill 54:43

We don't want to get your blood pressure up and your heart rate going too crazy in case would cause another bleed so you should refrain from being intimate if you can. And of course, we did the right thing and we refrained. What's the thinking like for you? And I'm asking you because I've never specifically gone out of my way to ask somebody. But I'm kind of trying to get the female perspective on how important intimacies and then how you go about navigating that.

Jennifer 55:20

A great question that I do not get asked all the time, that's for sure. I've been

hesitant. You know, these past three and a half years. I don't know, I don't have a good reason why just. Yeah, it's an important aspect in 97% of the marriages, I'm sure. But my husband and I are in such a great place with our relationship.

Jennifer 55:52

And that might not be priority one anymore. But it's being it's knowing that we're more than okay without that being a priority. And he's respected that and it's still a work in progress. No doubt.

Bill 56:09

Yeah, that's fine. One of the issues that I had was the touch on my left side. So because my left side feel so different, tender touch really hurts.

Jennifer 56:22

Yeah.

Jennifer 56:24

And that is a real challenge for me, because I noticed that during those moments, and that might put me off, or that might bother me. And that might take my mind somewhere where it shouldn't be going at that time.

Jennifer 56:44

Right.

Jennifer 56:45

It's even an issue. The tender touch is even an issue when I'm just driving the car, and I have my hand on the shift. And my wife reaches over and she just pops her hand on there. And even that bothers me that annoys me, because she's being tender.

Bill 57:04

And I'm saying to her, don't do that don't touch my hand, or don't be tender. And that's kind of weird, because (inaudible) to not be something that she's doing to express, you know, love and connection with.

Bill 57:23

That's hard to explain to because, yeah, there will be times where he, you know, he'll want to, you know, show a gesture or, you know, touch or whatever that is, or just be simply kind. And it's more of like a what am I agitated about? or Why do

I not want that or, you know, it's definitely still working with myself and through myself to figure out, you know, the attitude towards it.

Jennifer 57:53

And it's interesting to see the things that didn't drive me crazy before. But due now, and not just when it comes, not just when it comes to him, but just like the littlest things like, like loud noise or bright lights, or we'll be driving down the road and like hitting speed bumps or something like that, like that. I'm very sensitive to that type of movement. Those things just drive me crazy. I don't know why. But I just don't like it.

Jennifer 58:26

Yeah, I can relate to that a little bit. So especially, and a lot of stroke survivors on the podcast, you know, there's been more than 120 will tell you, that light sensitivity, sound sensitivity and too much stuff going on, for example, in a public place, like a, like a shopping center or a market or something like that is overwhelming.

Bill 58:49

And I avoided going out for many months to not experienced those overwhelming situations. But one of the things that makes me cringe is seeing people get struck in the head or, or Yeah, trying to watch the boxing or you know, he really makes me cringe and it makes me feel really uncomfortable about it.

Bill 59:17

And I am always kind of finding a way to protect my head if I'm in a situation where we're not being rough or there's just, I don't know, if there's just a potential hit me on the head. I don't want to have a bar of it. And if you touch my head, you're gonna know about it. I'm gonna let you know. It's gonna be pretty tough.

Bill 59:41

I feel that I feel the exact same way about protecting my neck and head but you know, because of this, I don't know how I got this tear in my artery in the first place. So like even if I go to a salon now with my hair, and you know that you get those sinks where there's that dip.

Jennifer 59:57

It drives me crazy. I hate it. I don't like it, we try and protect it and put extra

towels back there to make sure I'm as comfortable as I possibly can. But like, we're doing certain stretches. Even in class, there's things I won't do something like, it's not worth me feeling the way I feel, even if I'm not doing anything wrong.

Jennifer 1:00:20

I reckon you're not being too overcautious, because I something triggered when you said putting your head back in the salon. That that is a common cause of creating damage to people's necks in many various ways. And I've never put my head in one of those situations.

Bill 1:00:37

But I can imagine that, you know, if you have a sensitivity there, and you put your head in that position that that could cause a problem. Also, chiropractic for some people, has been catastrophic. Yeah, because there's a sensitivity to a blood vessel that nobody's aware of not even the chiropractor, and it creates an issue.

Bill 1:01:04

And then they have a stroke. And also, one of the people who I interviewed a lady called Clodah Dunlop, I can't remember which episode she was on, she was a police officer, and she was involved in a collision in the car at work. It wasn't a dramatic collision.

Bill 1:01:22

But that force, that's more force of her making her move her head backwards and forwards, created a tear, which turned into a clot A few months later, and then cause a stroke later. So the whole idea that you're going to be protective around the sensitive part of your body is pretty fair. And it's pretty good way to go about protecting your life, especially if you feel like you have a vulnerability there.

Bill 1:01:55

For sure, yeah, I definitely find myself extremely aware of things that maybe I used to be able to do. But now it's like, it's not worth it. You know, whether it's what you know, going skiing, or riding a roller coaster, or some of those more active activities that we used to enjoy doing from time to time, and now it's like, I'm good. It's really being okay with that.

Bill 1:02:20

Yeah. You don't miss it do you? I know what you mean. Because there's certain things I just do not miss, I just will not go there. And it doesn't matter that I'm not

doing it anymore. I've experienced that. And that's it, I'm done with it.

Jennifer 1:02:35

Yeah, I completely agree with you.

Nutrition after stroke for Jennifer Chapman



Jennifer 1:02:39

Tell me about you saying like, you're very proactive in your approach to recovery. As we wrap up, I'd love to ask you about nutrition and what you've done different or what you've continued to do or what you've started doing with regards to your food because I imagine when you're playing tennis and you're in the competitive sport like that you are really dialing in on your nutrition. How did that evolve or change or stay the same after stroke?

Bill 1:03:15

It's interesting, not a whole lot I've always cared about my nutrition and you know, kind of everything in moderation you know, method but really, this last year through the quarantine that we're having, you know, the States since last March. It's really allowed my husband and I to care a little bit more, right, because we've just cooked at home so much more than we ever have.

Jennifer 1:03:46

So finding the joy in I do more than he does as far as like just cooking and you know, finding better recipes, healthier recipes to eat at the house has really helped us both out so great, you know, and still doing my Pilates and still staying active. And luckily we have a we have a dog who we take out multiple times a day.

So finding that balance of activity as well as the nutrition piece. It's always been important to me, not a whole lot has changed per se on that level. How about you?

Jennifer 1:04:19

Yeah, well, at the beginning I did really well and even continued to do quite well. I didn't drink alcohol for the best part of five years. And I stopped eating gluten and caffeine and sugar.

Bill 1:04:37

And all those things that I realized I started to pay attention to when I was eating them will be making me feel unwell or they'll make me feel sluggish or slow especially with cognitive fatigue. Caffeine gives you a boost but then you have the drop off and that causes fatigue.

Bill 1:04:57

Sugar does the same thing and bread, like from wheys and gluten and all that had always interfered with my digestive system. And when you have a sluggish digestive system, you really have a sluggish brain.

Bill 1:05:11

So I started to dial in on my nutrition and really took out a lot of the inflammatory foods, and I call them the fun five. And I've done a little course around it. And those fun five foods include alcohol, dairy, gluten, sugar, and caffeine. And I just became this most amazing version of myself physically, I had become a far more efficient version of myself.

Bill 1:05:45

And I had less bad days as a result of making those changes. Now those changes didn't happen overnight. And they didn't happen very quickly. I dropped one of them off, maybe every, you know, six to 12 months, so that I wasn't being crazy about it.

Jennifer 1:06:04

Yeah, I think that would set you up for failure if you did, but I'm interested in your fun five and to learn more.

Bill 1:06:13

Yeah. So I interviewed a nutritionist and her partner who was a performance coach. So I got to the bottom of me really understanding from two other people's

perspective, why it's important to minimize those food items.

Bill 1:06:33

And it really reinforced in me what was important to help my brain be optimum. And then we got to that point of being able to take one off just over time, over time. And after three or four years, I had got to that point. But that didn't mean that when I went out with my friends, and we wanted to enjoy an amazing dinner, or a night out, it didn't mean that I didn't indulge, it meant that I just didn't do those things for the majority of the time.

Bill 1:07:01

And then when I needed to catch up with people and have fun and just be normal, then I would be normal. And then I would recover well from that and everything would be okay, so that's what I did. It's a real big conversation, we could go on forever and ever, and I really appreciate your time and for being persistent with me and reaching out because we did have a little bit of time there where I wasn't in the zone of doing podcast episodes, or taking emails from people or anything like that.

Bill 1:07:35

And I just want people to know that if you ever get to that point where it's too much, and you don't want to take emails and have conversations and you want to step away from life a little bit that you can, and that's really important for stroke recovery, but your kind way of just reminding me that we still needed to do this podcast is what I needed. So I really appreciate the fact that you did that.

Jennifer 1:08:05

Thank you so much for the kind words. Yeah, I was intrigued the first time we had connected I don't know when that was maybe three or four months ago. But yeah, you know, I got busy too. And I'm you know, working on my coaching business.

Jennifer 1:08:19

And so you know, I've got plenty on my plate, but I just think to be able to share, you know our stories. And maybe because maybe someone out there hears it needs to hear it and wants to hear it and wants to be in a better place than they are right now. With their recovery.

Bill 1:08:36

Thanks so much for being on the podcast.

Jennifer 1:08:40

Thank you I really appreciate it.

Intro 1:08:43

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Intro 1:08:52

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Intro 1:09:09

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Intro 1:09:26

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Intro 1:09:47

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Intro 1:10:11

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