

Healing The Brain After Stroke - David Norris

In this episode, Bill Gasiamis talks with Occupational Therapist David Norris about the steps he took to heal his brain after 3 brain bleeds and brain surgery.

Website: <http://occupationaltherapybrisbane.com.au/>

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Bill 0:00

I thought I was well, but actually, I was unwell. And I created the perfect storm for my body to go through that process where the weakest link in my head decided that you're not supporting us to be well, we're gonna have to bleed here. So I wasn't overweight, dramatically or anything that anyone would say, look, that guy's overweight.

Bill 0:23

And when I say I was busy like I was too busy to go to the hospital like I was so busy that I couldn't go to the hospital. I was so busy that I couldn't eat breakfast in the morning. Any of these are just general things, regular things that people do to sustain life. I was too busy. I don't know how I became so busy that I didn't

have time to just do those simple things. And what that led to what that led to me was becoming more frustrated and more upset and more angry, which was making the cycle worse.

Intro 0:58

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

Bill 1:07

Bill from recoveryafterstroke.com This is Episode 88 and today I am sharing an interview I did on the Memory Health Made Easy podcast with occupational therapist, David Norris. But just before we get started, did you know that you can now download all the words of any of the Recovery after Stroke podcast episodes as a PDF? It's perfect if you prefer to read and take notes or highlight different parts of the interview for future reference.

Bill 1:37

It's a great way to learn and helps retain new information in memory. Just go to recoveryafterstroke.com. Click on the image of the episode you have just listened to. At the very beginning of the page, you will see a button that says Download transcript. Click the button. Enter your email address and the PDF will begin downloading. Also, a few weeks ago, I launched recovery after stroke coaching, the people who have signed up and are now being coached by me are being helped to overcome challenges including fatigue, anger, and isolation, amongst other things.

Bill 2:11

So if you are a stroke survivor who wants to know how to heal your brain overcome fatigue and reduce anxiety, recovery after stroke coaching might be perfect for you. If you have fallen in the cracks between hospital and home care, and desire to gain momentum in your recovery, but do not know where to start. This is where I can help. I will coach you and help you gain clarity on where you are currently in your recovery journey.

Bill 2:35

I will help you create a picture of where you would like to be in your recovery 12 months from now, and I will coach you to overcome what's stopping you from getting to your goal want to know more? Just send an email to

bill@recoveryafterstroke.com and I will arrange a time to speak with you in person about how recovery after stroke coaching can work for you. And now here's the host of the memory Health Made Easy podcast David Norris.

Bill Gasiamis introduction

David 2:59

Welcome back to the The Memory Health Made Easy podcast. I'm your host, David Norris, and thank you very much for joining me. In today's episode, I'm joined by Bill Gasiamis of Recovery After Stroke. And he's a four-time stroke survivor. In this episode, we discuss what he's learned, you could say the hard way about what has helped him recover from these dramatic life events and how he has optimized and improved his brain health.

David 3:29

It's very, very clear folks that we can change our brain and there is no greater testimonial or proof of that. Then what Bill discusses in today's episode, as a therapist, working with people for over 20 years, I'm always learning from other people's experiences. Something that I took away from speaking with Bill today was his insights on mindset, relationships, and how they truly matter.

David 4:00

Especially how he's leveraged that in his recovery, and consistency, you'll appreciate and listen to Bill's story that he has had a dramatic life-altering event not once, but four times, which shook the foundations of who he was and what he thought was normal. And I guess rattled his perception of how he was traveling with his health. You'll appreciate that Bill shares quite candidly that he made it this wake-up moment in his life, but he demonstrates the power of lifestyle changes and the ingredients that have helped him improve his brain health over time.

David 4:41

Now, Bill faced a threat that not many of us have, which is that he had a genetic or something he was born with, that affected his risk for strokes. But he's now shown many times over the things that have reduced his risk of this occurring again. So if you're currently in a situation in life where you're thinking about taking steps with your brain health, well please dial into this show because this is not just for folks who have survived strokes.

David 5:10

This is for people who are wondering about what they can do to improve their brain health and a hope and not waiting for these momentous clematis, huge life events that shake us, rather than just want to be inspired by a story that we can do something to improve our brain health, and there's no greater testimony, as I mentioned, then for somebody who has demonstrated how they've recovered from great adversity, some of the main points that we discover in today's conversation, obviously around mindset and how that matters.

David 5:44

Dealing with his own personal Groundhog Day, he didn't deal with this once or twice as four times that was repeated but he got better and better and better with what he knew and what he learned over those years. And how working as a team with his family unit with his partner had been instrumental in his recovery. But it's also had a pervasive life-altering impact on his family and community as well.

David 6:08

At the end of this episode, if you like what you've heard today, I'd encourage you to subscribe to the show and share it, if you could discuss it, take a screenshot of where you're at or what you're listening to, and share it with others on social media because sharing a little bit of this information is going to go a long way in helping us reach more to teach more and to share more about what people can do to reduce their risk for memory loss.

David 6:36

So like it, share it, discuss it, and of course, apply it in your life. Now let's head over to the show and let's get to it. This is the Memory Health Made Easy podcast The show where you learn practical tips and experts share advice on what you can do to boost your brain span to match your lifespan now to the host of the show. David Norris.

David 6:58

Today, I am joined by Bill Gasiamis founder of Recovery after Stroke, champion of optimizing, stroke, and recovery, and podcaster, speaker and I guess around amazing man. Bill, I had the pleasure of meeting Bill almost a year ago now, where we had a conversation over a lovely morning tea, about what work he was doing, but more importantly, the journey he has been on to get where he is today so that he's created something amazing called recovery after stroke.

David 7:31

And he's passionate about helping people optimize and reclaim their independence after a stroke. I thought to open a conversation with Bill today to find out a little bit about what brought you here today. And one of the things that's happened a little bit in your story, that I think if you could paint a picture about, you know how you've come to be where you are today.

Bill's lifestyle before the first stroke

Bill 7:56

Good day, David. Thanks so much for having me on the podcast it's been a pretty cool journey, but tough and scary and you know, really concerning. So I suppose what got me here today is that I was a positive guy in that I had a lot of what's the word? So I was kind of like very upbeat and very positive, always half glass full kind of guy.

Bill 8:23

However, what I noticed myself doing a little bit before, February 2012, which was the first brain hemorrhage, is I noticed myself getting stuck in a rut of working way too many hours, feeling like I had not enough resources to get things and complaining that everything was really difficult, really hard, really impossible. And I was struggling with just my self-talk. And when I was at that point, I didn't know I didn't know that I was in that situation.

Bill 8:53

I was just complaining about everything. Everything was just too difficult and realistically the things that I think were difficult. I look back and go, well they weren't really difficult because after February of 2012, things then absolutely truly properly became difficult.

David 9:12

To give us a bit of insight there. February 2012, you had a brain bleed. Is that right?

Bill 9:18

Yes, I started to notice a small numb sensation in my big left toe. The numbness was there and it was like, less sensation and it wasn't hurting or anything then as the numbness spread over a week got from my little toe, my big left toe to to my

entire left side. And you know, we were so busy at work and I had so many things to do that I just avoided going to see anyone about it until about three days after I went and saw a chiropractor because I was always putting my back out and doing the you know, potential incorrect lifting techniques.

Bill 9:59

When I was getting paint buckets and all that kind of stuff because of our business, I used to have my chiropractor on speed dial to get me sorted out all the time. And I went and saw him and he said, look, it doesn't seem to be any inflammation or anything apparent at the moment. And the numbness was only by that time was only about my calf.

Refusing to go to the hospital



Bill 10:10

And he said, so just keep an eye on and if you need to come and see me, maybe the numbness is going to settle down. And if it doesn't, maybe we'll be able to get more of an idea where it's coming from, if it's related to something that you lifted. So then literally eight days later on the eighth day of the numbness spreading, I went back to the car back then he said to me, look, you haven't gotten a problem with your back, you need to go straight to the hospital.

Bill 10:49

And I argued with him about it for a little bit of time because the next day I had a really busy job to do or a really big job to do. So when I got to the hospital, that eighth day after I noticed the numbness in my toe they did a brain scan and they found that there was a bleed on the brain near the cerebellum. And what had been happening was a faulty blood vessel, called an arteriovenous malformation had burst.

Bill 11:18

And it started to leak and as it started to leak, it started to affect more and more of the brain. So as the blood clot in my head grew in size, and started to occupy more space started to switch off more and more of my body. So that's the first incident that's how I came to become aware that there was something seriously wrong with my health.

David 11:41

Yeah and Bill, all the sort of measures or flags at the moment that are around us these days that describe stroke symptoms, being the fast acronym that comes to mind, of any changes in our body or like this of this sort of changing sensation, changing strength changes in speech changes in ability to recognize others is an indicator of get something done quickly.

David 12:12

But in your situation you know, you're so busy you're out there working hard you had your business, you're very focused. And it took you know, for a life-threatening event of what it was, you know, eight days for it to punch you in the nose and say, Hey, Bill, eyes open mate, we need to do something about this.

David 12:31

So tell me were you a healthy guy before the experience, you describe a man, you know, the Bill before the stroke as a guy who was very busy with work, very driven, very motivated, very focused, probably very stressed. Tell me about your health, what was going on and how did you perceive health. What was your thinking about brain health and things like that before all this happened?

Unhealthy daily routine leads to stroke

Bill 12:56

I thought it was healthy. In hindsight, I was just doing some healthy things and then doing a lot of things that were not healthy. So I had some unhealthy habits, and they included drinking excessively at times, you know, smoking, not sleeping enough, not distressing and relaxing enough. And just being in a mindset and then self-taught that was not healthy.

Bill 13:24

Now I understand how I thought I was well, but actually, I was unwell. And I

created the perfect storm for my body to go through that process where the weakest link in my head decided that you're not supporting us to be well, we're gonna have to bleed here. So I wasn't overweight, dramatically or anything that anyone would say, look, that guy's overweight.

Bill 13:50

And when I say I was busy like I was too busy to go to the hospital like I was so busy that I couldn't go to the hospital. I was so busy that I couldn't eat breakfast in the morning. Any of these just general things are regular things that people do to sustain life, I was too busy. I don't know how I became so busy that I didn't have time to just do those simple things.

Bill 14:13

And what that led to what that led to me becoming more frustrated and more upset and more angry, which was making the cycle worse all I was doing was just getting myself stuck in this loop and I didn't have an outlet, I didn't have a way to jump out of it. And it came from being from growing up in a family which was loving, you know, really supportive and had everything that you could ask for except that the resources of my parents came from a part of the world that was poor after the war, after the Second World War.

Bill 14:46

And then when they came to Australia, their only mindset was, we've never had jobs before we've never worked before. Why don't we just find a job, stay there for the next 20 years, and work as many hours as possible we don't know when it could all be taken away from us, and we could have nothing again.

Bill 15:04

So that worked for them to a certain extent. And I just picked up on their habits and then continued following through, you know, their process to delivering outcome and work. What I didn't realize was that when they got sent home on an evening, because the shift finished, they got sent home. Whereas when you're running your own business, no one sends you home and says, you need to stop now.

Bill 15:31

You need to clock off. There are other things to do. I would work up to 16 hours a day, and eight hours of that day might have been on the tools an hour before that

might have been going and picking up materials for that particular job. an hour or two after work was to go into quotes at other people's homes, and then it was to do paperwork. There's just too much.

David 15:56

And it's interesting. He built your awareness of who you are and what created that condition of your beautiful family and what they took is their strengths as well. We've got this opportunity now here in Australia to, acquire wealth, a sense of safety, and security. And that was something that you carried forth in your world and your experience of life.

David 16:21

It's funny how these habits are just something that we attract and stick onto us with the Gropius, Velcro. It's often how I described, you know, habits that stuck and stuck onto us. And it takes a monumental experience sometimes to become aware of it. When I was younger, I lived in Brazil. And at that time, there was you know, this is when the AIDS epidemic, particularly in Sao Paulo, where I lived, became very strongly communicated in a public setting.

David 16:53

And a lot of people were out there speaking one young gentleman who had experienced AIDS came out and said, Look I don't know what life-threatening life-ending moment you need in your life, but we need to wake up. And it was that sort of tone of why do we wait for these moments before we get a sense of well, how did I get so far away? From what the road of health and wellness is? How did I get so far away from that? And how do I then navigate back to that and make your experience of that as being well, you didn't have one stroke, you've had three brain bleeds in your time.

Bill 17:38

So you know what it is? It's a great question that you asked about. How do we get to that point and not realize that if anyone's listening to this podcast, they are already most likely in that state, they are already most likely overworked? They are already most likely not taking care of their health or their idea of how is a bit warped.

Bill 18:02

They are already doing behaviors and patterns that are contributing to ill health.

So most of the people listening to this are already in that state that I was in before I became unwell. So if you're listening to this, it's you. Alright. So take stock right now. So then what happened to me was of course six weeks after, the bleeding at home, no work, no this no driving, no, going to the gym, nothing just go home do nothing relax.

Sudden memory loss on the second stroke



Bill 18:37

While they were waiting for things to settle down they could do another MRI and see what was happening in the brain. Just a couple of days before my six-week appointment. I had another episode, where this time the blood clot that was about the size of a 10-cent piece became about the size of a golf ball. And the way that happened was I went to work. I didn't go to work, but I went, I didn't go to do work, I went to work with the guys just to get out of the house.

Bill 19:06

And when I got there, I just noticed again, my left side going numb. And my head started to spin. And I got to that point where I had to ask somebody to take me back, take me home, and take me back to the hospital. And on the way back, I was calling my wife and we were chatting and everything was fine. And then when we got to my wife's place, our house, we drove to the hospital, which is about 15 minutes away, but by the time I got to the emergency, I didn't know who I was. I didn't know my name, didn't know what I was doing there.

Bill 19:41

I had no recollection of what was happening or remember getting there somebody

asked me how I help you. That's the last thing I remember. And then sometime later, I woke up and there was a strange lady at the end of my bed and she said to me you know who I am? and I didn't know who it was. It was my wife.

Bill 19:59

So was the second time there was six weeks later. And then when I got out of the hospital after that, it was a real challenge to type an email. It was a real challenge to remember who came to visit me. So many things that I took for granted, were gone. And one of my real massive concerns was, what if I don't get my brain back? What if I can't do those regular things like type an email, start a conversation, remember, during the conversation, what I want to say, and finish that conversation, it was a real, real big concern.

David 20:37

Bill I also read of another Bill this week, who came out and said Bill Gates, that is that his greatest fear in life is to lose his brain skills. And you've said it just so profoundly that you're so worried that you couldn't get your brain back. That it wouldn't get back to that level of ability that you need to thrive. And do the things that you want in life.

David 21:03

And I guess when I hear that Bill for so many folks, that is a brain destiny we could avoid that when we look at some of the numbers, you know when we just look at some of the stroke numbers across the world 15 million people are affected by stroke each year, almost 7 million people die from it. There's one person every six seconds having a stroke across this world.

Taking the initiative to a healthier brain

David 21:29

When we look at the issues around memory loss and diagnosis of dementia, one person every three seconds is diagnosed with dementia. And yet, when I look at your experience, and we're speaking here now you've got your brain back. You've worked hard at reclaiming that. Then when I read some of your story, and the people that you've connected with, it was like a massive jigsaw puzzle that you're trying to put together over time about what the steps are that you needed to take to to reclaim your sense of to reclaim your brain skills to reclaim your independence again, and you've had to deal with this again, you know, another

brain bleed later again. So, you've been on the canvas several times, but you've picked yourself up what sort of mindset takes those hits Bill, and go, Well, I'm going around again.

Bill 22:31

It's not one that I thought I was able to conjure up, to be honest, back then it was. So when I had that concern about like, Am I going to get my brain back I started to become frantic and, start to search what it is that I can do to heal my brain to get it better, even though it's got this thing with it. And it's got this problem that's going to be in there for a couple more years because, by that time, we hadn't worked dealing with it, I would have surgery, I had to do what I could influence the health and well-being of my brain.

Bill 23:08

So I figured that the small part that I can't influence that's leaking, I won't worry about that, I'll worry about the parts of it that I can influence and that's try to make it a healthier brain so that when it does have an injury, it can recover quicker. So I took out all of the bad habits that I was doing, you know, the smoking and the drinking the inflammatory foods.

Bill 23:36

What I started to notice was not only was my brain healing, but my memory and all those things were coming back online, even though I had this blood clot in my head now that was the size of a golf ball. So what I started to do was to support my brain to create new neurons and fire in different ways and to reroute and that was doing well.

Bill 24:00

So as I started to notice the difference in me and the way that I was feeling my energy levels started to get more and more excited about how it influenced my health and my well-being. And for the first time at 38, I was feeling healthier. Even though I had this problem in my head I had never felt it in my life, like for a long time since I was a young teenager.

Intro 24:22

If you've had a stroke, and you're in 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 recover? What things

should I avoid in case I make matters worse, doctors will explain things, but, because you've never had a stroke before, you probably don't know what questions to ask.

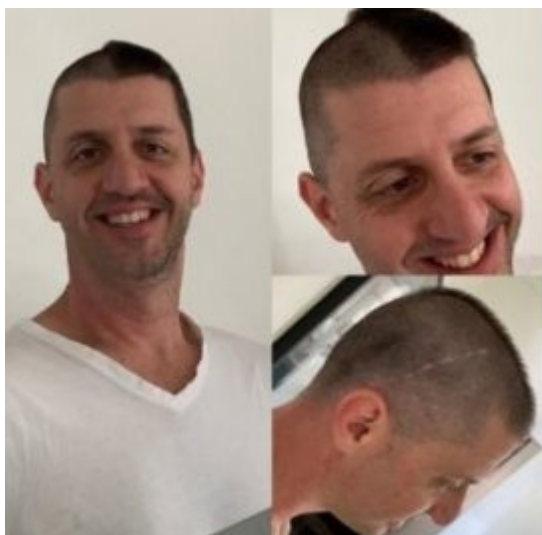
Intro 24:47

If this is you, you may miss 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. 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. S

Bill 25:35

So basically, what I figured was, we don't know if it's going to happen again. But if it does, I don't want to be responsible for making it happen again or contributing to it being a far worse outcome. I want to be responsible for doing everything I can so I can sleep at night, saying, No, actually, you've done the best you can to support your brain so that this doesn't happen again.

The 3rd and final bleed



Bill 26:03

But if it does, hopefully, the recovery will be swifter. So it did happen again. And in November 2014, almost three years after the first bleed. What happened was I was driving my car going to work by then I'd got back to work. I started doing all

the regular tasks in my life but changed the structure by which I was doing this. I wasn't working a lot.

Bill 26:28

I was going to this meeting in the city of Melbourne, and I started to notice a burning sensation on my left side, it was like I was in the sun, and half my body was sunburnt. But the other wasn't. I realized Sun was not up and I drove myself to the hospital, I took myself to an emergency, let them know what was happening. And they did another scan and they realized that it had bled again.

Bill 26:51

So this time, my surgeon came in and said, Look, you've tried to avoid surgery for three years. We've done a pretty good job so far. But right now the best thing for you to do is have surgery because the risk is that another bleed could be catastrophic. And what we want to do is we want to get you into surgery because that's less risky than it bleeding again.

Bill 27:13

So I figured fair enough. And she goes to me, do you want to do this? And I said, yes, immediately. She hadn't finished the sentence. And then she wasn't so sure. So she came back a couple of hours later, and she asked me again, like, are we going to do this are you up for it? And I said I'm up for it. And I was so confident I said to her, look, I've done everything I can do to give you a perfect brain you to work on other than this little thing that it's got a problem on.

Bill 27:41

I'm healthy, I'm better than I've ever been. I'm less stressed. I've been meditating. I haven't been eating this and I haven't been smoking. I haven't been drinking. For three years. I'm feeling extremely healthy. So that when and if this time comes, I present to you a body that's going to be the most able to handle this surgery and then bounce back from it.

Bill 28:06

So that was my goal but really what I didn't realize was happening was that that body well well-being supports resilience in the mind the heart and the gut. So it allowed me to be well-balanced in my body, which then supported my emotional well-being. And it supported my instincts to make the right decisions. So the resilience part of it is not something that I was trying to achieve. It just happened

to come.

Bill 28:44

And because I felt I had a level of control, which was control what you can and hand over everything that you can't do, somebody else is more capable. Then it allowed me to take those hits. Now what You might not know is that in November 2014, also, we lost my mother-in-law two weeks before my brain surgery. So that was dramatic, you know, so we had to get to a funeral, overcome all of that, and then get me on the table and manage, you know, my wife's emotions and challenges that she was going through. So, you know, we caught a lot of hits during that time.

David 29:26

Bill, it sounds like that there was storm after storm after storm that was rocking the shores. When I hear you talk about resilience and what was in your control and what is out of your control. You know, you've had an emotional experience with your mother-in-law, you've fronted up again, with a reality that you wished you weren't going to experience again, you were there, but you'd invested a lot into that body brain, emotional bank account.

David 30:00

Further years before that, so that yes, there was a hurt factor. Yes, there was some grief. And yes, there was a sense of wishing it wasn't happening, but you're able to put yourself in a space to grow through it. And I think that's the resilience element of some of the definitions that I've seen out there around that beautiful word. It's, it's through difficult times, we thrive and grow. And you've alluded to many factors that were responsible for your overall well being not just one, and that you decided to, yet I can't do anything about the bleed, but I can do something about all these other facets.

David 30:46

And I know that when I speak about the things that we can take control of with regards to Well, our brain health, our memory health, I list them out on our screen for folks to see and all these things are going to influence people's brain and body health. And it's somewhat overwhelming when you see it all there. And you think, what's the likelihood I'm going to move the needle on it? And then I show people that look at what you can't control versus what you can.

David 30:58

And there's only one or two things there that people can't control. yet. There's a whole scale thing where we can start to pull the leavers down to reduce the risk for this happening and to improve the payoff the trade-off is and what a positive one is that our, our brain-body? And I guess mind being how it works, is going to benefit greatly. I'm wondering if you could touch on some of those things for you on your journey that you felt shifted gears for you in terms of a sense of health and well-being.

Creating a team to support your recovery



Bill 31:50

Yeah, so in my course I'm developing 10 steps to brain health. For stroke survivors. It's the path that I went on and the 10 or so things that stood out for me but were significant in changing my life in a way that I didn't know before. So, one of those things is the team that you create around you. So the team of people to support your recovery, and that for me, included, you know, everyone from Reiki therapists to chiropractors, to occupational therapists, to psychologists, to coaches, to experts in the field of healing the brain people that I've interviewed to the doctors, to family and friends to support groups, you know, to the Stroke Foundation.

Bill 32:49

Every single person that I surrounded myself with, made a team that was all about me supported me helped me, etc. And I paid for some of those resources, but I also didn't pay for a lot of them. So I started to hang around with people that

I hadn't hung around with before. And they were inspiring and they were having my back and they are about helping me. So I created this amazing team. One of the other key things was nutrition.

Bill 33:23

So the information that's available now on how the path we've taken for nutrition, saying the last 40 years has led to increased, you know, disease and people being unwell. So, I suspended my disbelief about how could that be, you know, I'm a healthy kind of guy, I do things that they say on TV and the news and wherever. And I got curious about what are some of those things that I'm doing, how they support me, or how are they supporting me.

Bill 34:00

And for me, one of the key things was sugar and processed grains were not good for me. So stop consuming those and I just paid attention to the difference. So I was really curious about noticing what the difference was going to be. And I noticed in my health and my well-being that was massive. So one of the other things that I needed to do was I needed to quieten my mind.

Bill 34:26

So I had a lot of challenges around being an overthinker, I would have considered myself headcases in the past. And I, I found my inner self, you know, my wisdom within by meditating and making that a practice. So I would meditate in the morning when I wake up and meditate in the evening before I go to bed. And for some people, meditation is difficult and you know, they can't sit down and find a place I'm one of those people.

Bill 34:59

So I just put a little guided meditation track playing in the background while I'm laying in bed. And if I fall asleep during that I fall asleep. If I get to the end of it, I just switch it off after about five minutes, and I go to bed. So I got to that point where I started to notice the impact of hanging on a second, meditation makes me feel better, and it makes me have a better night's sleep. So that's another thing I improved is my sleep improved dramatically.

Bill 35:29

That meant that at night, I would wear blue-blocking glasses, especially if I was sitting in front of a computer screen in front of the TV. If I had overhead lighting,

I made an effort to create a process by which my body was starting to find its rhythm again and get me back to sleep. So I would have a good seven to eight hours of sleep and feel energized when I wake up in the morning.

Being gracious even after suffering from a stroke

Bill 35:56

And I think one of the biggest for me, was gratitude. And I know it's difficult to be gracious when you're going through a really difficult time, but I wasn't gracious for the things that I wasn't enjoying, like the blade in the brain. I was gracious with the things that I was enjoying, you know, like, being around family and friends and a cup of coffee and whatever it was that I was getting a lot out of. I was just grateful for and I would have a little meditation, gratefulness practice that came before my meditation, or after my meditation when I was in bed in the evening.

Bill 36:31

And it was just simply, thanks to the family. And thanks for the friends and thanks for my day. And thanks for this thanks for that. And I don't know it just worked for me. It made me feel a lot better. So I started to discover that these things were helping me with my emotions, and my emotional well-being started to improve. And because it started to improve, I started to have better relationships.

Bill 36:54

So I started to make an effort to apologize to people when I was being an idiot. Which maybe was more often than I thought, you know. And I started to pay attention to how my behavior was negatively impacting other people. So what I was doing was creating again, these loops of feedback between me and that other person, and especially with my kids and my wife.

Bill 37:18

So that interaction started positively when I became aware that when I would get home after a long day, a bit cranky with all the traffic and all the challenges of the day, if things were not quite perfect at home, and one of the kids, you know, left something lying around, or whatever, I would take it out on them. And I realized that that wasn't helping create a loving relationship between me and my sons and my wife.

Bill 37:45

So I started to take stock on how I could be a better version of myself and positively impact people. So what I didn't realize was that I was doing all these things at the same time, and I was getting this magnificent result. Only upon reflection later, did I understand that wow, actually, what a massive difference I've made in my life, look how much my life has changed. And I started to get that feedback from other people when I would go and do presentations, for the Stroke Foundation and talk about my experience, and do preventative talks about stroke.

Bill 38:29

And people would say to me, that's a great story. Thank you for telling that story that's made a real difference. I'm going to go tell my husband, what I just heard or my son or my brother or my mom or whoever. So giving back to other people was extremely fulfilling and rewarding. So being somebody that gives their time to other people who are, you know, also struggling with things. That's where I met a lot of stroke survivors. That's what we've got to talk about our experiences and to learn so I created this community around me.

Bill 39:03

So it's just and it doesn't end like that but I could tell you I would go for ages it just been so transformative and I am a different version of myself I started the podcast you know my podcast the [recoveryafterstroke.com](https://www.recoveryafterstroke.com) so I don't know I just don't recognize my old self anymore I don't recall that person and I know how he got there and I thank him for helping me create the foundation for what was to come because in that person who was struggling it was still the wisdom to be this version of me you know so I thank that person for you know that version of Bill for the wisdom that he had within him where he must have picked up from somewhere along the way so that when I needed it needed it. I was able to tap into it.

David 39:56

So Bill when I think about those points think That gathering your right team. You've used the word several times now, which is community, you've built a community around you that at early stages and key stages, no doubt they are focused on supporting Bill. But then there was a change in that relationship to where you've said, I need to support others. And, there was that sort of transition. And the other thing that I heard in it too, was a real sense of curiosity, that you followed that curiosity component, which then led you to pay attention to listen to

inquire to ask questions.

David 40:40

You know, how do I get around this? How do I solve that? What's the most accurate piece of information helped me through this? quieting the mind, getting out of that busy mind, and assuming a practice of morning and night around meditation and I hear, you know, so many folks will say, I've tried meditation, I can't do it. I've never been a meditator, it's not for me.

David 41:02

And it's very much around trying to find the right method to get the result. As opposed to seeing meditation as a label for a specific technique. There are many pathways, again, to acquire the skills to get the result of quieting our mind and it's just a matter of having a curiosity about it and exploring what that one might be. Sleep, no doubt, and getting those circadian rhythms, those awake and sleeping rhythms, and the body attuned to that helped obviously in your process, and a key component was gratitude.

David 41:39

And I hear the wonderful evolution in your relationship with your family. And I'm also curious about if you're to, look like a married man, I hesitate to do this at any moment of the day. But if I were to ask your wife about her observations of Bill and her journey because you've changed, you've acquired new skills you've developed yourself.

Making loved ones understand what you're going through



David 42:06

And in that process, you've influenced your partner and asked her to come on that journey. You've influenced your children and asked them to come on that journey. Were there any hard conversations at times around support or insight about what you're trying to do? And how, you know, I'm curious about how those conversations were nurtured over time.

Bill 42:29

Yeah, well, my wife's from a similar background to me. So she was just as resourced as I was, you know, back then. And she is a mom to work. She was, you know, a wife, amongst other things, and then one day she has to be a carer and she's got no skills or resources or training for that. So it was really hard. Those conversations were really difficult because how do you explain to somebody when you're experiencing fatigue for the first time in your life, debilitating fatigue where you cannot walk from the car to the clinic door, which is five meters away and not be exhausted.

Bill 43:08

How do you explain that to somebody and give them that insight so that they're okay with what you're going through? So I remember going into a fit of rage because my wife parked in according to me at the time, the incorrect car space, which was three car spaces further away, then another car space that was the closest one to the door of the clinic that we're going to and now this lady she's trying to work out like it's got me personally what happened in his brain making him a really bad aggressive person.

Bill 43:46

And is this the person I'm going to be stuck with for the rest of my life? What is going on here is this something that's just a result of the stroke? So she's having to type these new experiences and process them and she doesn't have a reference point to go back to say, sometimes emotional experiences get blown out after a stroke. And people act up and they'll have, they'll attack you, but they're not attacking you she doesn't know any of that.

Bill 44:12

So she struggled to deal with that kind of stuff and then, when I was unwell for a long time, I would say to her, look, I'm tired, I'm tired, I'm tired. And I remember her saying, like, I'm over it. I'm over you being tired forever. And she wasn't saying that I was making excuses or that I should stop being tired. She was just

over her husband not having the energy to do anything. And obviously, she was concerned about why that was the case. And we couldn't get two answers as quickly as we wanted to, which was immediately.

Bill 44:47

So she definitely would have noticed the difference in the type of person that I was post-stroke. So leading up to what I was doing with my work in February of 2012. To the kind of person that I became, after that, I was potentially into personal development a little bit before the stroke. But then after the stroke, it became all-encompassing. It became all about discovering myself doing things that I had never done before, like public speaking. It became about volunteering, which I never would have done before, became about all these things.

Bill 45:26

And she has to sort of sit back and go, Well, this guy now he's doing a podcast. Now this guy's doing this this guy's doing all of these things that I never would have contemplated or considered earlier on. So there's no doubt that I'm still me, and I still act up and press her buttons, and she presses mine. But I think I'm also better at minimizing those long-winded arguments that I would start over nothing that would go for weeks, to maybe a couple of hours, or hopefully a bit, 20 minutes maybe.

Bill 46:07

So as we grow together, and as we've experienced all this drama in the last seven or eight years, what I've noticed is that at least the two of us, we've become better at communicating. And we've become better at giving people space each other space and going, Okay, she's having a bad day. I'll just let her be. And we'll pick this up later. And vice versa. And so, my children as well, I would say they can sort of see the difference in me and they are responding in a way specifically that makes me know that.

Bill 46:42

And that, and I know that by the Christmas cards and birthday cards they wrote me, and some of the deep conversations I've had with these kids who are now 19 and 23. At the time were quite early on in teenagers so it's been a wealthy learning experience that I know some people going through can go through you have to have a very committed both partners to be very committed to the growth opportunities that come from such an experience because she has grown as a

person as well.

Bill 47:21

She has decided that, hey, if my husband has a used-by date, maybe I do too. And if I do, what is it that I'm not doing in my life that I should be doing because I don't want to have regrets? And she's taken steps to re-educate herself and take a new career path. She's got back to uni. She's volunteering as well these days. And she's saying I would like to think that she's seen what I'm doing and the fulfillment that it gives me and she's gone I'm curious about that. Wonder if I'm gonna get some fulfillment out of that and she does. She does. So it's been a really good time as well.

David 48:10

Isn't that interesting? Thank you very much for sharing such a personal insight on that experience because I don't think people get to hear the partner's voice or the partner's observation in that experience too. And that as a team as a, as a partnership as a family, growing through this experience, the other side of adversity is, you know, the different phase, it's a different phase. It's gratitude, there is happiness, there's joy, there's wonder, and these sound really hard and very difficult concepts when you're in the thick of it.

Growth Mindset

David 48:53

And, you know, when I think about the folks that are listening today, and who's likely, you know, Trying to acquire information and knowledge about what they can do to improve their brain health, to reduce their risk in their life, that they've decided to move into a growth mindset or a space where they are curious about what they can do for prevention. There's a curiosity there. And often, it is a single inquiry at first without the partner or a loved one involved.

David 49:28

And at some point, they turn to their partner. And they say, Hey, I'm doing this. I'm getting a lot out of it. Are you interested in doing this as well? I think this would be great for us. And there is tension sometimes there at that, in that first evolving conversation about how do we work together as a team. You know, the amount of partners that drag their spouses or loved ones along to my presentations, when I'm doing workshops, I can see it in the crowd.

David 50:00

There's a lot of rib nudging. Are you listening to this? Are you listening to this type of moment where I can see there have been some serious conversations about how he or she doesn't want to be there? But they're saying you need to listen and because that's what I'm on. And that's the pathway I've chosen in our you know, right now my life, I'm doing this, please come with me. Please be a part of this, please feel the benefits of this. And it's that conversion, that sort of negotiation experience where I can see a lot of wonderful aspirations for a better life fall over with hope. Do you have any advice for people about those moments?

Bill 50:45

Yeah. Do not tell your wife that she needs to do this course because she'll become better. After all, I did that. Better? what do you mean better? So, what I, what I started to do was, Hey, I'm doing this course, actually just like it to know what it's about, come with me just so I don't have to go on my own. You know, and it's not a course that would go for days or weeks or months. It's not a big commitment, it might just be a half-day thing or a day thing.

Bill 51:26

And she would turn up and I'd say, now I don't have to explain it to you. Now we can talk about what we learned and what you got out of it and what I got out of it. So it was more about coming with me just to be with me, rather than coming and learning what I'm learning because you need to learn this. And it's the same outcome. We both go to the course but it's a completely different approach and you get different feedback from your wife or your partner.

Testing our identities

Bill 51:50

So one of the other things that happens David is identities get tested, like okay, so, I identify as a person who goes about life in a certain way. And this concept that you've just thrown at me is going to make me question my identity. A small example of that is in the nutrition field is that when we, when I've gone through life and thought, I'm doing I'm being healthy, I'm doing something that's being healthy. I would have challenged anyone who came to me before February 2012.

Bill 52:27

They said to me, you know what, maybe you shouldn't drink alcohol and consume

sugar the way that you do because it's not good for you, I would've challenged anybody I would have said no when read the news or when I heard this, everything is okay. In moderation. The question is, what's moderation? So, what I would have done was question anybody because of what they're doing they are threatening my identity as if I am doing something to myself that's not good.

Bill 52:59

And how can I possibly do that that's not what I'm doing. I'm doing everything in moderation. So when you understand that some of the threats that you've experienced are not personal attacks, they're just because you relate to the world in a certain way. And now you're learning that there's a possible other way to relate to the world. It's something to get curious about. And to wonder, you know, why am I feeling uncomfortable about somebody saying to me, hey, maybe sugar is not for you. And then get curious and find out why they're saying that and what that means and that might not be from them because they might not have the words to explain it to you.

Bill 53:39

But when I started to do research on the internet about sugar and understood how it affects blood vessels, and how it affects connective tissue and how it affects collagen, and how it affects my eyesight, and how it affects all these things, I quickly realized that I'm going to support myself from healing, maybe I should consider not having sugar.

Bill 54:01

And one of the biggest challenges later was that I would go out to places with people. And they would say to me, what do you mean you're not having sugar, we're drinking. And they would find it difficult to grasp my concept because I didn't start the conversation, I would just say to the waiter or the waitress, I'd say, Hey, you know, sugar for me in that and no alcohol for me. So, this new opportunity to create a conversation if I didn't have the skills to, hold that conversation in a space, which was about enabling other people to be curious, then I would have found myself going back into my old habits so that I don't make other people feel uncomfortable.

Bill 54:46

Because I didn't want to do that. I didn't want to tell people what to do and how to be and how to, I didn't want to threaten their identity while I was questioning

my own identity. So one of the things that helps to do that is to surround yourself with people who are not going to judge you when you make a change in your life, therefore, shift your identity. And usually, those are people who are already potentially eating low-sugar diets, for example.

Bill 55:16

So when somebody who's a smoker decides to hang around with nonsmokers, it's okay not to smoke when he's hanging around with his old friends, they all smoke, and they offer him a cigarette. It doesn't take one. You know, it's a really difficult thing not to take that cigarette because you're challenging the status quo. So for me, the way that I learned to get comfortable with myself was to understand that my identity is not fixed. I don't have a fixed mindset and a fixed identity. I have an evolving one.

Bill 55:50

And a mindset. The word mindset is potentially a bit of a challenge for me because it suggests that the mind is set but in fact, We need to turn it into our mind setting, the mind setting is something that you should constantly tune and adjust and allow to be different whenever it must be different. Same with identity identity is not set. I'm not a guy who does 123 or four things in my life.

Bill 56:21

And if I don't give myself labels, then I can be whoever I want to be. So I stopped calling myself a smoker. For example, when I was smoking, I stopped calling myself, I don't know, a paleo person or whatever it was, I just allowed myself to be every version of everything, so that I could get the benefits from every possibility from every change from every learning experience. So when my wife comes to courses with me now she comes because I need somebody to go with that's all just something on the line. Come with me. Be together while I learn about these things, and therefore she doesn't feel like telling her to change.

David 57:10

Yeah, The discovery theme just seems to float with curiosity in your life, and just for folk when they're trying to have a conversation with a partner or a loved one or children, the invitation to come with me and leave it open. Is a powerful way of starting your journey at some point and I love the poetry of John O'Donoghue, an Irish poet, who sadly passed away some years ago, he had this gorgeous, descriptive way of capturing moments in life.

David 57:47

And he describes that rather than being on a threshold, you know, we were doing something in it. It's unknown. There is a there is Something that's always about that transition experience that it unfolds. There isn't another point. It's just becoming the next iteration. And opening yourself to that concept of how can I be open to all the possibilities of eating whole food, for example?

David 58:22

Well, I'm not going to label myself as this, that, or the other. I'm just going to nourish my body with the things that are needed and sense that you've gone through a real journey of discovery of probably early on jumping on some train tracks, which were, you know, the mind diet or the Mediterranean diet or this diet or that, but at a point where you went through something beyond this to go, how, can I eat fully, how can I experience my world fully without labeling myself in a way that constraints that and it gives such grace to the home, the Family the experience there that we're not stuck in this certain parameter to do things in a certain way.

David 59:07

And if we step over that line into something else, we're all set on where we're in the bad negative environment, give some grace around that as well. Whilst it's this is kind of a nebula-type observation of that experience, it, is something that is a deep sense of truth about it to Bill that with recovery, or with growth, or with development. We need an element of forgiveness. We need some curiosity. We need to have an openness to growth that anything is possible at the time of this recording.

David 59:46

Both you and I have witnessed human history in the last couple of days with the first man ever to run under two hours for a marathon. And his statement at the end of he still was filled with the joy of completion, there was this sort of no fatigue in his expression or his demeanor. And in that interview post-race it was anything is possible no human is limited.

David 1:00:17

Bill, I want to thank you very much for today's gracious and open conversation about your experience in recovery and also where you're at now, how can folks stay in touch with you Bill and maybe learn a little bit more if they're

experiencing or have an experience with somebody who's recovering from a stroke, what are some ways folks can reach out and connect with you?

Bill 1:00:40

Well, they can download the podcast, recovery after Stroke. They can go to my website, which is recoveryafterstroke.com, and I do a fair bit on Instagram, and people can get me at recovery after stroke. So any one of those ways. They can contact me they can send me a DM they can send me an email they can download the podcast and very soon if they want to get access to my course it goes live 10 Steps to Brain Health for Stroke Survivors, they'll be able to just subscribe to my email list, which is at the bottom of the page on recoveryafterstroke.com. And I'll update them when it's available.

David 1:01:22

Great Bill Gasiamis, thank you very much for your time today. I think champion of recovery after stroke is a good title. But the thing that came out of today that I'm going to just nurture a little bit more is, I think seed planter for grace, in recovery after stroke.

Bill 1:01:40

Happy to accept those labels.

David 1:01:44

Thank you, Bill. Lovely talking to you. Well, there we have it, folks. What a great conversation with Bill Gasiamis. From recovery after stroke. One in six people will experience a stroke in their lifetime and taking steps to reduce your risk of preventing this vascular or blood supply event from happening is going to help your brain have the rich, yummy nutrients it's delivered via the bloodstream to flood your gorgeous brain with the things that it needs.

David 1:02:16

Cutting those risks down is going to help her have a beautiful gorgeous brain for life. I'm Dave Norris, host of the Memory Health Made Easy. I hope you've enjoyed the conversation. If you have subscribed, if you would love to share this with others, I'd encourage you to do so because there are real benefits to doing it. So like it, share it take a screenshot as I mentioned earlier in this show, and make a comment about what you've learned what are the one two, or three things that you've taken away from today's conversation?

David 1:02:45

Because discussing it is going to help you learn it and hopefully apply it. So like it share it, discuss it, and apply it I'm your host David Norris and this is the Memory Health Made Easy podcast, feel free to come across Memoryhealthmadeeasy.com to grab more resources about the show links for Bill's, resources, and some more deeper articles that could help give you greater context to this conversation. Thank you very much for joining me and I look forward to speaking with you soon. Bye for now.

David 1:03:16

The purpose of the Memory Health Made Easy podcast is to educate and inform it there is no substitute for professional care by a doctor or qualified professional. This podcast is provided on the understanding that it does not constitute medical or personal professional advice or services. Instead, we would encourage you to discuss your options with a healthcare provider who specializes in your particular needs.

Intro 1:03:41

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