

“Stroke Abroad: A 21-Year-Old’s Journey of Survival and Recovery”

Kristin Taylor

In this episode of our podcast, we talk to Kristin Taylor who survived two strokes while traveling abroad. Kristin shares her journey of determination and resilience, as she recounts her experiences and the challenges faced. From navigating the healthcare system overseas to their emotional recovery, this interview provides a unique and powerful insight into the world of stroke survival and recovery.

Instagram

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Transcription:

Kristin Taylor 0:00

One quote that I live by, like after this all happened is if it doesn’t challenge you, it won’t change you. And I think it’s just taught me you’re so much stronger than your mind and you just gotta keep pushing and don’t ever ever give up like it’s okay to have shitty days and stuff like that, but just pull yourself out of that. And it’s taught me to don’t let other people predict what your future is gonna look like

because they're wrong.

Intro 0:34

This is the recovery after stroke podcast. With Bill Gasiamis, helping you navigate recovery after stroke.

Introduction

Introduction - Kristin Taylor



Bill Gasiamis 0:46

Hello, and welcome back to the recovery after stroke podcast. This is episode 235 And my guest today is Kristin Taylor, who was only 21 when she experienced two ischemic strokes on the Amsterdam leg of a European trip in 2014.

Bill Gasiamis 1:03

Her tenacity and rebellious spirit has proven to be very beneficial as she continues to overcome the limitations of her body proving her doubters wrong along the way. Kristin Taylor, welcome to the podcast.

Kristin Taylor 1:15

Thank you.

Bill Gasiamis 1:17

Hey, fellow Aussie from Wollongong, I love Wollongong.

Kristin Taylor 1:21

Yep, yep.

Bill Gasiamis 1:24

Beautiful part of the world. Thanks for being on the show. Tell me a little bit about what happened to you.

Kristin Taylor 1:29

So I was actually 21 at the time traveling during Europe, with my friends. And previously to these trips, I had been a really bad migraine sufferer went to a number of neurologists, and no one could really pinpoint why they were happening and stuff like that.

Kristin Taylor 1:56

I used to always get cluster migraines where I'd have three days off work sometimes I'd get the whole lose my vision, everything like that and get a really bad headache and then throw up and everything so yeah, and leading up to these trip but I was I don't know you can say I was a little bit stressed.

Kristin Taylor 2:18

I was a little bit of a stress head. And I had a few migraines were now we look back at it and think they could have been TIAs. They were really bad where I completely would lose my vision. I actually had pins and needles down my face one time, but just was just like whatever.

Kristin Taylor's Really Bad Migraines

Kristin Taylor 2:39

No one can solve these it's just hereditary. I just get migraines, I have to get used to it. They prescribe this medicine, it was called Maxalt. And I used to take that it never used to help Panadol never used to help Nurofen I ended up I couldn't take anything with codeine in it.

Kristin Taylor 3:00

That was kind of the only thing that helped. But then the neurologists figured out that what was happening, I was taking the codeine, when I'd get a migraine, it would knock me out, take away the pain. But then the next day, I would get another migraine so that I would give my body more codeine.

Kristin Taylor 3:23

So yeah, had quite a few bad ones before I ran overseas. And then I had a little bit of a turn when we we're in London visiting one of my friends, family members, and I just said something doesn't feel right. I almost had like vertigo, I just was off balance, I was feeling sick, I was just really, really exhausted.

Kristin Taylor 3:51

And that lasted probably about three days. And then anyway, we're traveling, we're in Amsterdam. And I used to also get migraines when I'd be hungover. Obviously with all the artificial stuff in drinks and everything like that.

Kristin Taylor 4:11

So the day before I had the strokes, I yeah had a really bad migraine was throwing up and everything like that. But then my friends obviously being overseas wanted to go out. And we went out for the night and I just said to them, I just don't feel right.

Kristin Taylor 4:29

Like I've still got a really bad headache. I still feel really sick and everything like that. And then one of my friends she just said come on, let's go we'll go back to the apartment. And yeah, and then we were back at the apartment together and she just looked at me and she said are you okay? And I said yeah, I feel a little bit funny. I'm gonna get up gonna go to the toilet.

Kristin Taylor 4:54

And for some reason she followed me. And then when I came out of the toilet, I just said to her, I feel like I'm gonna faint. And then I obviously quickly laid down on the floor. And she lifted my legs up and everything. And I just looked at her and I said, I don't want to scare you but all down on my right side of my body, I've just got these really, really intense pins and needles.

Kristin Taylor 5:20

Like, you know, when your arm goes to sleep, and like, you just can't shake the pins and needles and they hurt, like, so this was happening, you just would have drawn a line down my body. And the whole right side was just gone, just pins and needles.

Kristin Taylor 5:39

And anyway, she got me up, we sat on the lounge. And I think without us even

noticing, I stopped using, obviously my right side. So the two clots that I had the first one, they were both on the left side of the brain, which affected my right side.

Kristin Taylor 5:39

And then I started to get really bad headache. And then I started to feel really sick. So almost similar to how I used to get my migraines and everything, but obviously had the pins and needles and everything, which was different.

Kristin Taylor 5:58

So she just like kept monitoring hand everything. And then my other friends came back from their night out. And I think everyone was just kind of trying to play it cool. And I'm very, I don't know, if I have to go to hospitals, something seriously is wrong and that scares me.

Kristin Taylor 6:38

So I avoid, avoid, avoid, which I did in the situation. We were just all hanging around in the lounge room. And my friends were just saying to me, you know, like, if you want to go to hospital, just let us know. We'll call an ambulance, all of that stuff.

Having A Stroke Abroad

Kristin Taylor 6:56

So we just waited probably about two hours. And I was obviously starting to panic a little bit because the pins and needles weren't going away. I just kept wanting to vomit. My pain in my head was just getting excruciating. And then yeah, we made the call to call an ambulance, obviously being in Amsterdam.

Kristin Taylor 7:22

They were like, young girls probably drink spiking, drugs, whatever. So they weren't really that nice when they picked us up. So got me in an ambulance. And then we're in emergency got sent for a CT scan. And then as I was in the hospital, I started to become really disorientated.

Kristin Taylor 7:51

I was getting confused, I started to lose my speech. And that in itself was so frustrating, like I can't explain that to anyone like they were asking me what day

it was. And I would say something, but then this, like gibberish would just come out and it was so so frustrating for me.

Kristin Taylor 8:13

And then a nurse is still we're just kind of being really horrible. And my best friend at the time, she just looked at the nurse and she said, Are you sure my friends not having a stroke? I'm like, because she had watched her dad prior to coming overseas, watched her dad had a stroke.

Kristin Taylor 8:34

And the nurse just looked at my friends and said, you girls need to calm down. Your friend is not having a stroke, just sit down and be quiet. And then anyway, so they left us down in emergency that if they did think it was drink spiking or whatever, they didn't give me any fluids.

Kristin Taylor 8:54

They didn't want me on a drip. They didn't like give me any painkillers, nothing. And then eventually, I think it was like close to 10 hours later, they put me up in the ward. And the head neurologist, he came and did the rounds the next day, so I was still in the same clothes from the night before I hadn't had any fluids hadn't had any water like nothing.

Kristin Taylor 9:11

And then the had neurologist came around and first thing he did, he got me to sit up in the bed. And he went to shake my hand and without even noticing I gave him my left hand instead of my right. And he just looked at me and he said, why didn't you give me your right hand, I said oh I don't know, it just didn't work.

Kristin Taylor 9:51

And he said okay. And then he goes alright, close your eyes. I was like alright, and then he goes, lift your left arm up. lifted my left arm up fine, and then he said, lift your right arm up. And then he repeated himself. He's like, lift your right arm up.

Kristin Taylor 10:10

I'm like I can't. And then he said, Okay, he's like, stand up with me and said, I can't. Sorry, he helped me stand up. And then he's like, okay, he's like, how's your head feeling on like, excruciating. It's really, really killing me. And he's like, and then he did the sensation test where they run that horrible thing under your foot, and everything like that, which was horrible.

Kristin Taylor 10:41

And I just explained to him the sensation that I was having down the right side of my body. And I said, it's horrible. Like, I just want to get rid of these pins and needles. And he said, Okay. And then he just looked at his team. And he said, it's almost 24 hours later, why has she still not gone for an MRI yet?

Kristin Taylor 10:55

So then anyway, panic, obviously, my friends, they left the hospital, they went home to shower, and everything like that, I went to get my MRI, which was for somebody, you just can't explain it for somebody that can't actually move their right side of their body, and had these pins and needles just laying still for that amount of time.

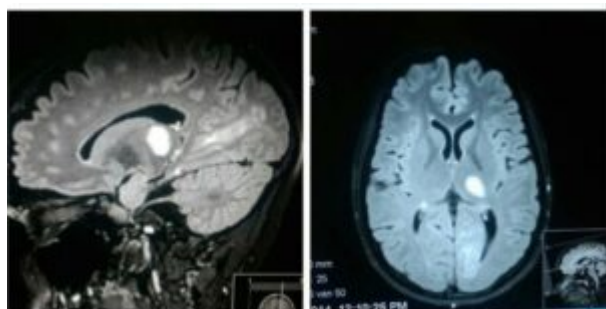
Kristin Taylor 11:22

And having that anxiety of like, What the hell is going on? It was just horrible. It was like I was in that MRI machine, for like hours, and just couldn't wait for it to be over. And then the nurses wheeled me back into the room. And within, it was about an hour they had neurologist came back and he said, Where are your friends? I said they're just off showering, they'll be back soon.

Kristin Taylor 11:51

He said, Okay, we'll just wait until they get back. So obviously, being on my own, I was just like something seriously wrong. And I was just like, oh my gosh, and then my friends came back and God bless them, they had come up with a complete plan of what we were going to do.

Kristin Taylor Had An Ischemic Stroke



Kristin Taylor 12:09

They're like, when you're better we're gonna go here, we're just gonna chill it, like my family friends house in London, like trying to be all positive. And I'm just

like, No, something's seriously wrong, because the neurologist wouldn't talk to me on my own. And then anyway, he came back when they were there. And he just said, Look, I'm extremely sorry, you have had an ischemic stroke, you've got a massive clot.

Kristin Taylor 12:42

And I kind of just was in shock. And I had one friend, she just walked out of the room, I had another one on the end of the bed, just crying. And then I had the other two just like what the hell and I just burst into tears. And the head neurologist just said, like, we need to take this extremely seriously. He's like, I know your friends are here with you.

Kristin Taylor 13:08

But we need to get in contact with immediate family now and we need to get someone over here. So they kind of just said, I'll give you a minute. And then we'll come back and we'll have a chat and everything. So yeah, we were all obviously blubbering messes. I was just everything was running through my head just going oh my gosh, like, I'm like this for the rest of my life.

Kristin Taylor 13:36

I didn't even know what to think. And there was a point there that I was like, I just, I'm gonna get emotional. But like with the pins and needles and everything. I thought, if they're there for the rest of my life, I don't even want to be here. Like, that's no way of living. Like it was just horrible. And then yeah, anyway, my friend obviously contacted my mom, and was just like, everything's okay. But Kristin just had a stroke and my mum was just like.

Bill Gasiamis 14:14

Everything's not okay.

Kristin Taylor 14:16

Yeah, yeah. She's like, what do you mean she's had a stroke? And she just explained the situation and everything. And then obviously, that day, my family got things rolling and everything. The hospital was really good. The head neurologist spoke to my mom and just said, like, you know, we need someone you can't both come over here because we need someone in Sydney, organizing everything organizing all appointments for when I'd get back and everything like that.

Kristin Taylor 14:51

And then, anyway, while she was in the air coming over, they ended up moving me into a private room on my own. It was a completely different story, the nurses and the doctors and everything that were really harsh prior to that they all were fussing, they were like, We're so sorry what happened like, and I was disgusted with like the care that they gave me prior to knowing what was wrong and they even came around to like shower me to wheel me into the like shower.

Vision Loss Caused By Anti-Migraine Medication

Kristin Taylor 15:26

And I just said, No, I don't want you to touch me. Like I'd prefer if my friends can shower me and everything like that. And then yeah, when I got moved into the private room, the next day, I thought I was having another migraine attack. The symptoms that would usually occur with my migraines, they were all out of whack. So I would usually lose my vision first, I would get the headache, and then I would vomit.

Kristin Taylor 16:01

Where we this time around, I felt sick first and went to throw up and as I went to throw up, I got the headache like really bad shooting pain on the left side of my head again. And then quite a lot of my vision went and it wasn't. Usually when I'd get my migraines it would be almost like pixelated, where these time, the vision on my right side was just gone.

Kristin Taylor 16:31

And I was like, okay, that's not normal. And then my friend said she's got medication that she usually takes when she has these migraine attacks. Can we go get it? And the doctor said, yeah, go get it, we'll have a look at it. Anyway, when I got back, the doctors had a look at that. They took one look at it. And they said no, she should have never ever been prescribed these because these actually my type of migraines obviously, the arteries are tightening and that's why I would lose the vision.

Kristin Taylor 17:03

Where apparently this medication would do the same thing. So it was making it

worse. Yeah, yeah, so that was interesting. And so no wonder why it never did anything because it was actually making it worse. Anyway, they left us alone for a bit. And actually my sister, she was traveling in Southeast Asia at the time, and she called me because she hadn't heard from me for two days.

Kristin Taylor 17:35

And she knew that something was wrong. And when I spoke to her, I was obviously going through these having a little bit of a turn. Didn't even remember talking to her. And at that point, she was like, I need to get over there like, and anyway, the head neurologist came back eight hours later and he said, How are you feeling? I said, my head is killing me.

Kristin Taylor 18:02

And he said, Okay, how's your vision? And I said, No my vision's still gone. And he said, Okay, it's been eight hours now we'll send you for another MRI. So and by this point, this is two days in hospitals. So I was already on the heavy blood thinners, getting the injections like everything. And yeah, they sent me for another MRI.

Kristin Taylor 18:30

And then in between that my mom had arrived. And my friends could go back to the hotel and chill and everything and gosh the poor thing she was in all sorts she was just an emotional wreck, and she was jetlag, she was so tired and everything like that. But yeah, when she got there, the head neurologist came around and said, Look, we're really, really sorry. You've actually had another stroke.

Bill Gasiamis 19:02

That time.

Kristin Taylor 19:04

Yeah, so if I didn't have the second one. My vision would have been fine so I would have Yeah, I had obviously lost like my mobility on my right side and everything like that. I lost the sensation on my right side, but my vision up until that second one was completely fine. So you can imagine my mom was just like, how did you miss these?

Kristin Taylor 19:31

Like, how could you not and the head neurologist was just like, you know, she's young. She's 21 like she wasn't showing like the typical signs like she could still

you know everyone says if you're testing someone for having a stroke, get them to poke their tongue. Yeah, get them to do these. I could still do that. So I'm like that's not always the case.

Just Another Bloody Tourist

Bill Gasiamis 19:57

And you're a tourist, you're in a country where it's known for people traveling to go and get high and stoned and all that kind of stuff, you know, the bloody tourist who's turned up sick to the hospital, everything kind of fits the picture of another bloody tourist, you know, and it's really hard for them because they've got to separate the tourists, in their mindset from the sick patient and always assuming that it's a stroke is probably the wrong thing to do.

Bill Gasiamis 20:33

But never assuming it's a stroke is also the wrong thing to do. And, you know, that's the thing, like, and maybe they were on the 14th hour of their shift, and God knows what was going wrong. You just became unlucky with the way it all turned out.

Bill Gasiamis 20:54

And now, what's really interesting to me is how vividly you are telling the story and how well you're sharing like, every single detail, it doesn't feel like it just happened yesterday, it seems like it's just so fresh. I know it was in 2014. What's it like for you, nine years later, to be sharing the story in this way?

Kristin Taylor 21:24

I don't know, it's yeah, I'm like, I was really nervous about coming on here. Because I didn't know how I would feel. But then, like, I love telling my story, because I love inspiring other people, especially young people. And, yeah, it does honestly just feel like yesterday. But I think, I'm happy to share my story, just because I really, really want people to know that they're not alone.

Kristin Taylor 22:06

And you're not I think the hardest part for me was the head neurologist, he just, I don't know, my family are very, very positive. And we try and make light out of a crappy situation. And you can say, this is a pretty crappy situation. So like, I obviously was learning how to eat again, and everything like that.

Kristin Taylor 22:36

I went to OT once my sister had got over there. And my mom just said, can you go to OT with her? And it was the first OT session. And they said, Okay, pick up a pen and write your name. And I didn't even think of that. So I was kind of, I guess I was more fascinated with what was going on with my body than really concentrating on what was actually happening.

Bill Gasiamis 23:08

What you couldn't do? I like that though. That's really interesting to be fascinated about what's happening to your body, rather than worried about what's not happening. I think that's a real good shift in your mindset.

Kristin Taylor 23:22

Yeah. And the more doctors said things to me, the more it pushed me to go against what they said, if that makes sense. So the first thing they said to me, all right, what do you want to do with your writing? Do you want to train your left side? Or do you want to retrain your right side? And I just looked at them and I'm like, Are you kidding? I'm like, I'm just going to retrain my right side.

Kristin Taylor 23:48

I'm not going to like learn how to use the left hand now like, and everything and same thing, like the head neurologist came around, and we were having a good laugh. I was I think we were testing myself, we were eating peas, or something. And like, my hand just had a mind of its own. Obviously, I lost the vision. So I've lost my hand eye coordination.

Kristin Taylor 24:15

I'm sitting in the hospital bed with a spoonful of peas, and literally, peas have gone everywhere and it just so happen we're having a good laugh about these. And then the head neurologist comes in and sits down, and we're just like, oh, you know, like making a good joke, she just "pead" all over the floor and everything. And then he was just like, you know, this is a really serious situation like, you'd be like this for the rest of your life.

Kristin Taylor 24:52

And he goes, what do you do for a job? And at the time, I was working with children with autism, quite a high behavior, quite demanding on the body and everything like that. And he said, yeah, you're not going to go back to that when

you go back to Sydney, you're going to have to change jobs, you'll probably be walking with a walking frame or a walking stick and all of that, and I just looked at him and I said, how do I get out of hospital? When can I get out? And he said, Oh, let's just take one day at a time. And I said, no, like, what will it take for me to be able to leave here?

Intro 25:32

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 actually recover? What things should I avoid in case I make matters worse, and doctors will explain things that obviously, you've never had a stroke before, you probably don't know what questions to ask.

Intro 25:57

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 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.

Kristin Taylor 26:35

Because I was just so off him then once he said that I was just like stuff you I love my job like and I'm not giving that up like so anyway, you said once you can walk for a minute, then we can think about getting you out of hospital. And I just said okay, all right, no worries.

Pushing The Limits To Get Out Of The Hospital



Kristin Taylor 26:56

So anyway, that day, I just said to my mom, I was like getting in the wheelchair, get me downstairs, take me outside. I do not want to be in this hospital. And I won't come back until they need me for OT or Physio, anything like that. So we just every day they take me down in the wheelchair we just go for walks around Amsterdam with me and the wheelchair and everything like that.

Kristin Taylor 27:23

And then yeah, the day came where they were just like, Okay, you have to walk for a minute. And people on here will think like a minute is nothing. And I was just Yeah, I pushed myself so hard. I used to my arm would just sit up like this. And I just dragged my right leg and I walked for that minute nonstop. And I was so so sick. I was just throwing up so much after it like my head was pounding and that just did me for the day.

Kristin Taylor 27:58

But after that, they would like to say that was two weeks. And they will okay. As long as you've got all year they obviously checked if we have like cardiologists booked in if we add neurologist appointments or booked in back in Sydney, we have to get the health insurance to organize all of the flight home.

Kristin Taylor 28:18

The nurse, I have a nurse with me to fly all the way home to come all the way to the front door with me. And everything. And yeah, they let us out. So we by this time, my sister as well. She flew back continued on her holiday. But then my mom and I we were just at a hotel near the hospital for I think it was an extra week just

while they organize like the nurses and everything like that.

Bill Gasiamis 28:46

Where were your friends in the meantime, because they're on holiday.

Kristin Taylor 28:50

Yeah, so they were really they were in two worlds. And they were just obviously trying to be good friends. And they like we don't want to step and my mom just looked at them and said you know what you need to continue your holiday. It's not now that she needs you. It's further down the track that she'll need you. So they continued on. They went to sail Croatia and all of that stuff. And then I just told them obviously when I got home but yeah.

Bill Gasiamis 29:23

Wow. That would have been hard. Was that hard for you? You're laying in hospital. They're leaving going to the next leg of the trip?

Kristin Taylor 29:32

Yeah, yeah, extremely hard, but as well, I think I was just extremely although things happen the way that they did. I was extremely grateful that I wasn't on the next part of the trip because the next part of the trip was sail Croatia, knowing me I probably would have been hung over I probably would have put myself in a room on the boat and things could have ended up a lot worse.

Kristin Taylor 29:57

I mean after things did come through, and we knew what was going on the doctors and the nurses obviously had a complete turnaround and they were really good. The only thing that we didn't the pain threshold, apparently in Amsterdam is completely different. So the whole time, they had morphine on standby for me. And I just kept saying, like, pain is at a ten.

Kristin Taylor 30:24

And they're like, Okay, here's more Panadol. And it wasn't until like the I think it was like the ninth day in the hospital and these lovely nurse he came in and he said, do you understand our pain threshold? Because like, I'm reading your body and thinking, Nah, there's no way this girl is a 10. And he's just like, one is actually our worst with pain. So he's like, we've had more pain on standby for you this whole time. And you've just been taking Panadol I'm like, Oh my gosh.

Bill Gasiamis 31:03

And 10 is the worst for us in Australia. 10 is the worst pain. And you're saying and they're going one. Oh, my God.

Kristin Taylor 31:14

Yeah, with just looking at me, you would have been able to say I was just yeah, I've never ever had pain like that in my life.

Coming Home After A Stroke Abroad

Bill Gasiamis 31:24

That's crazy. What's it like landing back home after you've been on such a dramatic? life-threatening, you know, problematic situation so far away from home with nobody around you until they finally got there? Like, what's it like coming home?

Kristin Taylor 31:43

That still makes me tear-up. That was such an emotional like, even like before going home, the nurse obviously had to come to the hotel, and she had to meet me and she had to test everything out and explain everything that needed to happen on the flight and go through all of that. And even then the day she came to see me, she goes, You need to calm down.

Kristin Taylor 32:13

She's like, your heart rate is through the roof. And I was like, I know, I'm like, I just want to get home and because everybody was so drained, like with the time difference, like trying to call Dad and get him to organize everything. Like was just yeah, so the nurse, she actually came all the way home with us. So she even it was just such a big emotional experience because we pulled up in the driveway.

Kristin Taylor 32:47

And dad was obviously there and even the nurse like she walked me up to the front door and we were just all crying and I was like I was ruined. I was so like, just being on the plane. And everything was just touching back down in Australia and just getting home to like Sydney and getting home to like my own, like house was just, a breath of fresh air and just like oh my gosh, like I can't believe what has just happened.

Kristin Taylor 33:25

Like my mom, she will still memories pop up on Facebook of like the day we're all coming home and she's just, she's always like, Oh my gosh, I could still cry like, and we often have like little moments where we just we'll both cry and everything like that. But it was just an amazing feeling getting back home and because it changed everyone like even my dad was working at the time and even mom kind of took turns.

Kristin Taylor 33:55

So my dad who very rarely took time off-work was yeah, he took I think it was about a month off and he took the responsibility of pretty much being my carer taking me to all my rehab appointments. We'd go do the shop together that was part of my rehab learning to walk with a trolley and everything like that. And just getting out around in those surroundings and stuff which was amazing. My family was just great.

Kristin Taylor 33:55

What was the underlying cause of the blood clots. Did they work that out?

Kristin Taylor 34:38

So they ended up in a neurologist back in Sydney, he said the contraceptive pill and then the type of migraines that I used to get so obviously are from the contraceptive pill. I was getting migraines which Touchwood since I've had a stroke and I have not touched any form of contraception. I have not even had one migraine. And now it's really funny because you talk to people, you talk to females, there's obviously enough studies now. And I've had, I think, to people I've known have gone to a neurologist and said, I'm getting migraines, first thing they do take you off the pill.

Bill Gasiamis 35:25

I know the back of the box that has all the side effects and all that says stroke in one of them. And in the other one, you know, there's a whole bunch of other symptoms, right? Like, of what can happen if you take the contraceptive pill, when you decided to go on birth control, which is a really smart decision for a lot of people to do, right?

Bill Gasiamis 35:55

You think you're being proactive and you're doing it? Were you aware of the risk

of stroke? And was there no moment where you went? I never had migraines. Before then I started taking this thing. And now I have migraines. Did you connect the dots at all? Was there any idea? Did you have any awareness of any of the side effects?

Kristin Taylor 35:55

No. And the frustrating part, too. I'm so frustrated at myself, because I didn't even really need to be on it when I was on it. But because I had obviously found one that worked with my body. I was just like, I'm not even going to go off it. But originally when I was younger, and did when I first started on it, I was just yeah, the stuff that it did to my body. I just wished it was enough to go not look at what these can do to your body, that's it.

Kristin Taylor 36:21

Yeah, but I did. Like I had the neurologist in Sydney. And he was extremely funny because I talked they always say bring all the medications you take and everything like that. And he wouldn't even touch the pillbox he was just like was I think a bit funny about that. So that wasn't even we just did a food diary. I eliminated like, I love chocolate. And I eliminated chocolate for a year we found out that was a trigger. I couldn't have tomatoes couldn't have processed food, all that stuff like alcohol, all those triggers. But no one ever said anything about the contraceptive pill.

Bill Gasiamis 37:44

Ridiculous. I love the fact that you're 21. And you've handed him a contraceptive pill. And he's unfortunately, gone and done the dad thing and he's probably thinking of why he's doing all that stuff and he's gonna kind of talk about it. I'll just ignore it pretend it never happened. He's probably got a daughter your age and thinking could just as easily be my daughter. He was freaking out. It didn't know what to do.

Kristin Taylor 38:08

Yeah 100%.

You're A Lot Stronger Than You Think



Bill Gasiamis 38:13

Love absolutely love it. So you've overcome those initial couple of years? What did they teach you about yourself? It would have been hard and you would have had to go through as a 21 year old. Some of the hardest days of your life, you know, you're just fresh out of school just starting to explore the world spread your wings sort of discovering what's out there, then you get stuck in this situation. What does it teach you about yourself

Kristin Taylor 38:46

Like a prime example, the head neurologists, you're gonna be like this for the rest of your life. I had a physio that said I was inspired by my sister who used to do bodybuilding and base it off you with all your issues like you'll never be able to do that. So straightaway I was like no that's it. Like once I finished my rehab everything I thought I was Yeah, into the gym and I'm yeah, I'm coming up to like my third season of competing in bodybuilding comp I guess it's yeah, just told me you're yeah, you're a lot stronger than what you think. And if you believe you can overcome it you 100% can and you should never ever, ever doubt yourself.

Bill Gasiamis 39:43

Yeah, I agree. So what are you dealing with now? It's been nine years have the vision returned. Do you have deficits on that right side still? What What's that situation like?

Kristin Taylor 39:58

That So you can literally draw a line down the middle of my body and my right side, the way I explain it, because as soon as I say numb, everyone's like, what you can't feel me pinching you or you can't feel this. And I was like, no I can. So when you go to the dentist and you get a numbing needle, and you can still kind of feel your face, but it's that weird sensation.

Kristin Taylor 40:28

So I've got that all down on the right side of my body. And obviously, like some points on my right side are a little hypersensitive to others. So I do need to be mindful, like with hot water, or anything like that, that can sometimes catch me off guard because on my left hand, it won't feel too bad. But then on my right, it may. I've got so division on my right side, never ever came back.

Kristin Taylor 40:55

So it's like the way to explain it. It's the top quarter of my eye on the right side, and then a little bit of the bottom quarter. And then, obviously, like with my right hand, they always say like your fine motor is a lot harder than your gross motor. So my right hand of turn seizes up or it twitches a lot. And I find that happens quite a lot when I'm really really stressed.

Kristin Taylor 41:32

Apart from that, everything is pretty good. I'm fitter than I've ever been. I hated the gym prior to the strokes like previous two strokes. And now I just love it, I find if I don't go to the gym, my body will not shut down. But I can kind of see the right side, but I'm struggling a little bit. It also, I have primary lymphedema in my lower legs, which is really a swelling and my lymphatic channel doesn't work properly.

Kristin Taylor 42:10

And I actually with the strokes, I set it off in my right arm as well, because I was obviously doing everything I could to try and get like the sensation back in my arm. I was getting acupuncture, I started doing boxing, so rehab for for coordination, and that triggered, unfortunately, this swelling in that arm. But yeah, apart from that, I think we just pushed really, really hard because one person said to me, when we got back to Sydney.

Kristin Taylor 42:44

Whatever you're left with, after 12 months, that's probably going to be permanent. So that 12 months is crucial. And then another family friend who had experienced a stroke, he just said, look at me. He's like, push yourself because if you don't use it, you'll lose it. Like it'll stop.

Bill Gasiamis 43:06

Not everything's permanent. There's a lot of reasons why people have deficits.

Sometimes it's a learned deficit, where you know, remember you said at the beginning, you said, do you want to just learn to write with your left hand, that whole entire situation, if you had gone yeah, let's learn with my left hand, you may never have learned to write with your right hand again.

Bill Gasiamis 43:30

And that's a learned experience, that's you expecting your hand not to work and it doesn't, whereas other people will have the connection completely gone from that part of the brain. So that's why they can't write it's a very different version of why they can't write and it may not get better, it may retrain to some extent, but it may therefore be easier for them to just swap hands and learn how to write with the other hand.

Bill Gasiamis 44:01

The reason I asked you about what you're left with is because I know you go to the gym, and it's something that I've avoided because my left side, you describe my left side, when you described your right side, it's exactly the same. And my left side fatigues so quickly, that if I'm pushing a barbell above my head, it feels unsafe on my left side, because my right eye wants to keep going forever and my left sides going were done after two or three reps.

Bill Gasiamis 44:33

So because it's so uncomfortable, I've always got to overthink it. I just got sick of I said stuff that I'm not doing that and of course I want to benchpress or anything like that. Now I'll use you know machines that are you know, electronic sort of assisted machines, the ones that are not free weights. And I noticed in on Instagram on your very lot most recent posts, you've got a strap around your right wrist holding the row bar. Is that because you can't grasp it properly? Why do you have the strap?

Kristin Taylor 45:13

I use straps because I feel my wrist on this side just isn't as strong. And it will often I don't know whether it's because of my vision too, as well. I do have to be really careful with my right arm because it will often it will often flare out. And I have to be really mindful of that or get someone to help me at the gym. But I mean, I've Yeah, absolutely where myself with that.

Kristin Taylor 45:48

I've worked very, very closely with a personal trainer, after my rehab and everything like that, even last year, I was working with another personal trainer who's become a best friend. And we used to do three sessions a week, and yeah, and I'm always I need to be in front of a mirror. I'm very specific with how I train.

Bill Gasiamis 46:12

And look at your form. Yeah, is that why?

Kristin Taylor 46:15

Yeah, cuz I've got the vision missing. If I'm doing any weights or anything, I can't see my right arm as soon as it goes out of there. So I'm always I need a mirror in front of me. Yeah, I'm very things on like, my right side, like lunges and everything like that I'm very off balance. And that becomes frustrating. But that's something that's a goal of mine this year to kind of push her that and yeah, get on top of that.

Not “Looking” Like You’ve Had A Stroke



Bill Gasiamis 46:46

I imagine like, when you look at your Insta, it's very inspiring, by the way, the fact that you've overcome all of that stuff, you're competing in bodybuilding competitions, you can tell the amount of work that you've put in, but and I look at those pictures and I'm like, that's one healthy looking person.

Bill Gasiamis 47:07

Is there situations where people look at you, and then you are healthy, there's no

doubt about it, and look at you and then go, like, stroke? What do you mean, like, you look fine? Do you get that you get that part of the conversation where people just can't wrap their heads around? How somebody that looks like you is in the shape that you are, can be stroke affected?

Kristin Taylor 47:35

Yeah and you get I think the biggest question is like, what do you mean a stroke like an actual, like full blown stroke or like, just a, like a TIA or? And I'm like, No, I have photos to prove that two massive clots in my brain. Like I still like even doctors. Doctors are fascinated by it, which was quite frustrating when I was younger, because you were like a guinea pig and everyone would just get so excited to be working with this like person.

Kristin Taylor 48:05

But like I'll still get doctors that will make a joke and be like, What have you done in your like previous life to like, get handed these cards and everything but yeah, everybody I think as soon as you say stroke victim, they expect someone with a droopy face like everything like that. They just Yeah, yeah, so no, it does. Yeah, definitely shocks people.

Bill Gasiamis 48:32

They can't connect the dots, some in some of the outfits you're you're getting ready to go out with your friends or whatever you're probably at a party. Nobody at a party would be able to tell that you're living with the right side feeling the way that it feels nobody would have a clue whatsoever.

Bill Gasiamis 48:52

It's the invisible part of stroke. That's the sometimes frustrating and challenging for people. Do you like sometimes get frustrated about the fact that you might be having a bad day but you don't look like somebody who's unwell or gone through?

Kristin Taylor 49:11

I think that's the hardest thing or I'm very confident very social and everything like that. But then I think that was the hardest part of the stroke people not being able to see what is going on and I do get I can get quite awkward in a social atmosphere, especially with the vision so until I know people and feel comfortable like if we're going to a restaurant or something I will say can I just sit at the end of the table where the wall is?

Kristin Taylor 49:50

Because otherwise I feel rude because I'm constantly turning my head to talk to people if a way that comes up on my right side I get really awkward if I haven't been able to see them. Where that can be quite frustrating. But yeah, in the beginning, that was I had a lot of anxiety around that. And I actually, to the point just pulled myself back, I thought I was ready to go out and socialize.

Kristin Taylor 50:16

And I just had a few bad experiences where I've just put myself back into my shell went home and cried and everything my family was like, it's okay, pull yourself together, like, tomorrow's a new day. And yeah, but now it's just we make jokes about it. Like I've once I get to know people, I tell them I'm like, you know, you can pull faces on my right side. I don't even see you when you're there and everything like that. But yeah, it can become quite frustrating sometimes. But yeah, especially if you run into things if you don't know they're there. But I mean, if we don't laugh, we cry, right?

Bill Gasiamis 50:56

Running into things would be an interesting situation. I have my vision, I still run into things a lot, because sometimes I just can't tell. I can't judge the distance between, say, my shoulder and the doorframe. And if I've had a big day, and I'm tired, I'll be closer to the doorframe than I thought I was and a whack. And it's like, oh, well, there's a doorframe again. So totally appreciate that. I know what that's like, with the vision thing. Does that mean that you're unable to drive? Have you been able to get your license as a result of vision loss?

Kristin Taylor 51:36

No. So what I think you have to be in a certain vision field, and I'm okay, because I've still got quite a lot. It's just that where I felt was more and it was the complete right side. And I wouldn't be able to, so very, very grateful for that.

Bill Gasiamis 51:58

Yeah. It's been nine years, those friends that were on that trip with you. Do you still see them? Do you keep in touch?

Kristin Taylor 52:08

The one that was there pretty much the whole time. I'm still extremely close with her. But unfortunately, I Yeah. outgrew? I think the other ones. Yeah.

Bill Gasiamis 52:21

Yeah. Well, that happens. Those types of trips. Tend to yeah, definitely be that way. Anyway, it's a good reason to get together with those people and travel because everyone wants to travel so often, people outgrow each other. That's pretty cool. But it's so great to have this other friend that you're still there after all that time. How important is that relationship?

Kristin Taylor 52:48

Yeah, yeah. No, very, very important. Yeah. And she's like, She's literally my number one supporter. She's, my first bodybuilding comp was up in Queensland. She was there, but she's just amazing. And yeah, obviously, it's very special bond there.

Bill Gasiamis 53:09

Yeah. How did you go in the competition? Did you finish where you want it? Or does it even matter?

Kristin Taylor 53:16

Yeah, no, I did. Yeah, I was extremely. I think my first one I came 2nd, 3rd, and 5th and then the one that I did last year, I brought home my gold medals got three golds. One 2nd. And then another show. I got three 2nds. One, 4th. So this year, keep pushing and hopefully bring those golds home again.

Bill Gasiamis 53:42

Wow, that's pretty cool. And what are they judging? are they judging? What do they judge at bodybuilding competitions?

Kristin Taylor 53:52

Oh, they judge everything. They judge your overall physique, they judge symmetry which is obviously a big thing for me because obviously my right side years ago, was completely different to my left side, even like my butt cheek on my right side would used to sit down like that. So and we had to do a lot of one sided things to get that to catch up to my left side that they go off everything they go up your bikini, your stage performance, your, everything whole shebang.

Bill Gasiamis 54:31

I'm very curious to understand what you said about the symmetry because my left is my weakest arm anyway. But it now does look, you know, people paying attention. It does look different to my right arm. So does my left leg. They kind of

a bit leaner. I suppose. That's the only way to describe it. How hard was it to get your right side to be symmetrical or as close to your other side as possible, because that's a big job. Because it's the side, that's the weakest. And you have to work it the most.

Kristin Taylor 55:15

Again, just that initial year, we just worked extremely, extremely hard, and just really, really focused on that. But now to the point, I almost concentrate so much on my right side. I'm doing a lot better than what I think to the point I ignore, my left side, which is my good side by coach last year used to always say, Stop concentrating on your right side so much is actually doing so well. And you're not focusing, you're starting to neglect the left side. So yeah, yeah, no, I guess like everyone used to say, like muscle memory. It's there. You've just got to use it. You've got to activate it. And yeah, if you use all those muscles will reconnects themselves.

Bill Gasiamis 56:10

I love that because I've had a lot of conversations with people on podcasts. Now, we've never really spoken about that before. We've never really touched on the asymmetry of one side to the other, except in one of the interviews that I did with a powerlifting stroke survivor, an amazing lady.

Bill Gasiamis 56:37

I'm going to bring it up now. So for people listening and watching, I'm going to recoveryafterstroke.com/episodes. All the episodes are listed from one to 233 at the moment. This is going to be Episode 235, I think. And the person who I interviewed, it's Kelly Studebaker, and she has hemiplegia so her I think it might be her right side doesn't work so much. So she does powerlifting with one side of her body. So one side of her body is completely jacked. It's massive, like double the size of your arms.

Bill Gasiamis 57:29

And the other side is just, you know, like normal regular stroke affected, not jacked. And she had a ruptured arteriovenous malformation or brain hemorrhage. And I think she was only aged 11. So in her adult life is when she decided to become a powerlifter. And it was again, she wasn't meant to be doing powerlifting. And nobody ever sees you as a possibility of being a powerlifter, and she's just gone are stuffed, I'm going to be a powerlifter.

Bill Gasiamis 57:38

And she is and the photo that I've got on the episode thumbnail. You just see she's lifting a weight, it's on an angle, and you just say the ripped shoulder, bicep and tricep and it's just it's such a powerful image. I love it. I love sharing that story of Kelly. She was on episode 106. Man I get really excited when I hear people like yourself, overcome the trauma, overcome all of the hard stuff and then achieve something that you're not meant to achieve.

Achieving The "Impossible"

Bill Gasiamis 58:51

And Kelly is one of those people and so every other person I've interviewed on the podcast, I mean, they're the same. And that's that's what I love about getting people on the podcasts because they were you guys do for me is you prove over and over and over again to people who are early on in this journey, that we can overcome stuff we can get better.

Bill Gasiamis 59:13

We can do a lot with our deficits. And we can overcome a lot of the deficits even though they don't leave us you know, we can leave them behind. So it's just really cool. Yeah, as you could tell, I get really excited. I just love it. So what happened with work? Are you still employed in the same role you're in or has it changed? Have you moved on what's going on with that now?

Kristin Taylor 59:44

Originally I went back. We just obviously slowly introduced me back into work and then yeah, I ended up working with the really challenging kids again and the ones that would always have tantrums and stuff like that like, but in saying that my patience, and my understanding for the children with autism was just out of this world, because I was like I could understand their frustration, like with writing, and everything like that.

Kristin Taylor 1:00:22

And it just made me love that job so much more. But I ended up, I did leave that job. But I was in that for 12 years working at the same school for seven years, then went on and did program managing for before and after school care. And now I manage a respite home for people with disabilities that come and stay for

short term accommodation.

Kristin Taylor 1:00:50

And I just, I just love it and love helping people. And yeah, and quite a few of my clients, you know, they have like, they've got other things going on, but a few of them have had strokes. So we sit down, and we have a chat. And yeah, talk about all that. And it's just, it's nice to be able to do that profession and be able to connect with people as well, and just have that understanding.

Bill Gasiamis 1:01:20

You really relate to them in a way that non stroke survivor can't relate to, and we never want them to right? You really understand exactly what it is. They're going through. And they would feel a lot better being in an environment with somebody who understands them to that extent, because most people don't understand that they don't really get it.

Bill Gasiamis 1:01:48

It's giving you that insight to be able to understand frustration about what an autistic child might be experiencing. With writing or with expressing themselves. It's just so cool that you get that understanding, and it makes you better at your job.

Kristin Taylor 1:02:10

Yeah, yeah. Like I wouldn't change it for the world. I absolutely love it.

Bill Gasiamis 1:02:16

Congratulations. I really love the way that you've evolved and overcome a lot of your challenges. When's the next competition?

Kristin Taylor 1:02:27

It'll be near the end of September so I'm competing.

Bill Gasiamis 1:02:36

And then are you training for that? The entire time? And then does this sort of training take a more serious sort of turn just before competition? How do you prepare for a competition like that?

Kristin Taylor 1:02:56

So right now, we're technically in the building/the bulking phase. So we'll try and

increase my food as much as we can try and build as much lean muscle as we can. And then usually anywhere from about 20 to 15 weeks out from your competition, you start cutting calories and stripping back that body fat percentage, which that's when Yeah, the mentor.

Kristin Taylor 1:03:27

Stage comes into place. But yeah, yeah. And then you have to after the competition, you reverse out of it. And you have to slowly increase your calories and everything and then you go back into a building phase to build more muscle and.

Post-Stroke And Training Diet

Bill Gasiamis 1:03:45

Wow. What is the thing the one food that you miss the most when you're going into the calorie deficit stage?

Kristin Taylor 1:03:54

I love Krispy Kreme Doughnuts original glazed absolutely obsessed. Like they just ordered Oh, my sister always goes oh my god, here you again. And I'm like, No, they just melt in your mouth. And I just Yeah, I love them.

Bill Gasiamis 1:04:17

Fair enough. They probably the details delicious. I know exactly what you mean, they're kind of plain and amazing and fabulous at the same time. I can see it. I can see the mental struggle when you have to go off them. How many would you eat in the year leading up to them and then do you go cold turkey on them. It's just sounds like you have to start. It sounds as serious as stopping smoking or drinking or stopping alcohol.

Kristin Taylor 1:04:47

Yeah. When you're when you're eating prep and you're in the cutting phase. It's very, very straight to the point. I would go if I go out with friends for dinner. I'll be sitting there at Kmart container of food it's no drinking No, like, you're Yeah 100% I have to track all your food to a tee you're Yeah, you're mentally exhausted.

Kristin Taylor 1:05:15

We laugh about it because you actually you get prep brain where you just, your body's eating in starvation mode is firing because you're you're burning a lot more calories than your intake and yeah, but I guess it's a sport and yeah, people would call us bodybuilders crazy. But yeah, I think you have to be a different breed to do it, but we just love it.

Bill Gasiamis 1:05:41

I agree. And do you get hangry? Hungry and angry at the same time?

Kristin Taylor 1:05:46

Very, very hangry. You get yery, very hangry.

Bill Gasiamis 1:05:55

Wow. Hey, thank you so much for being on the podcast. I really appreciate it. Thanks for sharing your story. I think it's gonna make a big, it's gonna help a lot of people listening, feel okay about the situation that they're finding themselves in and overcoming that situation and then doing amazing things.

Bill Gasiamis 1:06:13

9, 10 years down the road, and maybe even further. I really appreciate it and it's so nice to talk to a fellow Aussie every so often because because there's less of us on the planet. There's not so many who I've been able to get on the podcast. I truly love it. And I'm just so grateful that we could connect and that you're willing to be on the show.

Kristin Taylor 1:06:38

Definitely. Thank you so much for having me. It's been great. Yeah, it was a wonderful experience I'm glad I could share my stories.

Bill Gasiamis 1:06:47

Well, thanks for joining us on today's episode to learn more about my guests including links to their social media, and other pages and to download a full transcript of the entire interview. Please go to recoveryafterstroke.com/episodes. If you'd like to support this podcast, the best way to do that is to leave a five-star review, and a few words about what the show means to you on iTunes, and Spotify.

Bill Gasiamis 1:07:11

If you're watching on YouTube, comment below the video, like the episodes and to

get notifications of future episodes. Subscribe to the show. Sharing the show with family and friends on social media will make it possible for people who may need this type of content to find that easier. And that might make a massive difference to someone that is on the road to recovery after their own experience with stroke.

Bill Gasiamis 1:07:32

If you are a stroke survivor with a story to share about your experience, come and join me on the show. The interviews are not scripted, you do not have to plan for them. All you need to do to qualify as be a stroke survivor or care for someone who is a stroke survivor or you are one of the fabulous people that help stroke survivors on the road to recovery just go to recoveryafterstroke.com/contact.

Bill Gasiamis 1:07:55

Fill out the contact form and as soon as I receive your request I will respond with more details on how you can choose a time that works for you and me to meet over zoom. Thanks again for being here and listening. I really appreciate you see you on the next episode.

Intro 1:08:09

Importantly, we present many podcast designed to give you an insight and understanding into the experiences of other individuals opinions and treatments. Protocols discussed during any podcast are the individual's own experience and we do not necessarily share the same opinion nor do we recommend any treatment protocol discussed.

Intro 1:08:26

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Intro 1:08:54

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Intro 1:09:17

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Intro 1:09:34

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