

Elaine, 81

Avid gardener and former seamstress alerted to symptoms of atrial fibrillation via her smartwatch, **BRISBANE**

Avid gardener, former seamstress and craftswoman, Elaine, 81, Brisbane discovered she was living with atrial fibrillation (AF) – a common type of heart arrhythmia¹ – after her smartwatch first alerted her to a ‘racing’ heart rate of 130 beats per minute, in August 2021.

Concerned by this alert, Elaine visited her GP who prescribed a Holter monitor – a portable device used to record the heart’s electrical activity over an extended period. However, the Holter monitor did not detect any irregularities. She was then referred to a cardiologist, who reviewed the electrocardiogram (ECG) recordings from Elaine’s smartwatch. These readings revealed signs of AF and atrial flutter, leading to a confirmed diagnosis.

AF is a chronic, progressive disease caused by poor atrial contraction (heart pumping),¹ involving an irregular and often rapid heartbeat.²⁻⁴ The incidence of asymptomatic (showing no symptoms) AF is between 30 and 40 per cent.⁵

Elaine has had to face a diagnosis of AF at an already difficult time. She was battling her husband’s failing health and the impact of AF forced her to give up activities she loved, including gardening, sewing and crafting.

Over the ensuing three years, Elaine experienced intermittent AF episodes, often while sitting in her home and during the early hours of the morning. Though she had no other physical symptoms beyond the elevated heart rate detected by her smartwatch, the episodes were unsettling and obtrusive. She was placed on medication to manage her symptoms.

In 2023, her smartwatch flagged yet another cluster of AF episode which prompted her to see her cardiologist. She subsequently underwent two procedures to treat both her AF and atrial flutter.

Today, Elaine has returned to the activities she loves, including walking, gardening, and crafting hobbies. She has chosen to share her story, to raise community awareness and understanding of living with AF, and to urge those affected by the disease to prioritise their health.

This is Elaine’s story.

At the time, completely unaware that she was living with the most common type of heart arrhythmia, Elaine’s smartwatch alerted her to a rapidly quickening heartbeat, in August 2021.

“It was around 3am in the morning when the first alert from my smartwatch came through. My heart was beating at around 130 bpm, and I immediately knew something wasn’t right,” said Elaine.

After experiencing continued and ongoing alerts on her smartwatch, Elaine became increasingly concerned for her health. Three days later, she decided to visit her GP who performed some tests and gave her a Holter monitor to assess the heartbeat irregularities.

Her GP subsequently referred her to a cardiologist who diagnosed her with AF and atrial flutters.

“The AF episodes I experienced could last anywhere from 30 minutes to over an hour at a time.

“As a result of living with AF, I consistently felt physically exhausted and I was frequently concerned with when the next episode might happen, which took a toll on me mentally.



“While I tried not to let it get me down, being diagnosed with AF while undergoing treatment for breast cancer and my husband also becoming quite unwell during this time, meant it was quite a taxing few years,” Elaine said.

Over the next couple of years, Elaine was prescribed medication that effectively managed her symptoms, however in 2023, her symptoms returned, and she experienced multiple AF episodes, prompting her to revisit her cardiologist and further investigate treatment options.

“I went through an incredibly difficult period living with AF and my husband became very unwell. A couple of years later, I was diagnosed with breast cancer in December 2024 and began treatment in January this year.

“I eventually found a solution for my AF that has worked for me, and I am again able to enjoy the things I love such as gardening all day and knitting. I feel much better in myself these days,” said Elaine.

Elaine has an important message for Australians living with symptoms of AF.

“With the support of my doctor and specialist, my heart health has significantly improved, and I feel so much better.

“For anyone who is experiencing symptoms or feels as though something is not quite right, I would encourage them to seek medical advice in a timely manner,” Elaine said.

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To coordinate an interview with Elaine, please contact:

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Individual symptoms, situations, circumstances and results may vary. This information is not intended to be used for medical diagnosis or treatment or as a substitute for professional medical advice. Please consult your doctor or qualified healthcare provider regarding your condition and appropriate medical treatment.

References

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