

Liver transplant gives hockey player a new power play in life

VIDEO	AUDIO
	NATS
Jason	Lacing up your skates.
Julianne	"My name is Julianne. I am a hockey player."
Jason	It's a mundane moment that means so much.
Julianne	"My name is Julianne. I am a liver transplant recipient."
Jason	Returning to Mayo Clinic for her four-year follow-up after a lifesaving transplant in 2015, Julianne Vasichек is trying out the indoor hockey facility at Mayo Clinic's Sports Medicine Center.
Julianne Vasichек Liver Transplant Recipient	"I have a big smile on my face because it's been — and I'll try not to get emotional — but it's been a long road."
COURTESY: YouTube/NCAA	NATS UP – "Vasichек waits ..."
Jason	She is a former Division One All-American, a two-time national champion with the University of Minnesota Duluth women's hockey team and a member of the U.S. Women's National Team. Throughout her hockey career, Julianne has taken her fair share of hits on the boards.
Jason	But none of them compare to the blow she received in 2008 — diagnosed with a rare liver disease: ...
Julianne	"... primary sclerosing cholangitis, or PSC."
John Poterucha, M.D. Transplant Hepatology Mayo Clinic	"PSC is a disease of the bile ducts. Think about it as a deciduous tree, where the liver is the leaves on the tree and the bile ducts are the

	<p>branches and the trunk of the tree.</p> <p>What PSC does is it causes inflammation of the bile ducts. Over a period of time, those bile ducts, because of the chronic inflammation, they get a lot of scarring. And, so, they narrow down. So the bile ducts start to become partially or even completely blocked.”</p>
Jason	For years, Julianne suffered from symptoms of PSC like pain in the abdomen, fatigue and itching.
Jason	In February 2015 at age 32, her condition rapidly declined. Her liver was failing.
Julianne	“I don’t know how much longer I had, honestly, based on everything.”
Dr. Poterucha	“She became much more ill much more quickly than most patients, and it turned out that she actually developed a second problem with her liver, ... where the blood from her liver was unable to drain.”
Jason	Within days of being admitted to the hospital and on death’s doorstep, a liver donor became available. And doctors at Mayo Clinic performed a lifesaving transplant.
Julianne	“I’m standing here talking to you because of a person that, you know, chose to make that selfless decision. And it’s one of the most selfless decisions you can make.”
Dr. Poterucha	“She was so ill that somebody who, you know, was older or was less physically fit probably would have succumbed to this illness, where she was able to at least stay well enough to get a liver transplant.”
Julianne	“So this is 61 staples.”
Jason	Four years after her liver transplant, Julianne can still provide details on each one of her many surgical scars.
Julianne	“So what we’re seeing is the original transplant scar here. So it’s ... it’s beautiful.”
Jason	It’s been a long road of recovery, and she’s feeling

	happy and healthy.
Julianne	“Be positive. Laugh at yourself. You know, just do what you can to get by — whatever that is.”
Jason	And appreciate life’s moments.
Julianne	“Every day is ... is certainly a gift.”
Jason	For the Mayo Clinic News Network, I’m Jason Howland.