

When surgery isn't the answer

Video	Audio
	"There are stories behind almost all types of dancing."
	For Allison Nilsen, dance is more than just a hobby.
	"It's emotional."
	It's what she's studied for years.
	"I went to college for it, and I danced over 50 hours a week in high school."
	It's what she does for a living.
	"I teach ballet, tap, contemporary, sometimes hip-hop."
	And, most importantly, it's how she expresses herself.
Allison Nilsen Patient	"Whenever there are personal things going on in my life or if something tragic happens to somebody I know, then I use that as, like, inspiration for dances that I make."
	"I don't know what I'd be doing if I didn't dance."
	Six years ago, just as Allison was receiving a dance scholarship to a college in Jacksonville and making plans to move to Florida, her future in dance was suddenly not so clear. Allison was diagnosed with a rare abnormality of blood vessels called cavernous malformation, or cavernoma. Cavernomas can occur in the brain and cause brain damage as well as seizures.
	"I had to convince my mom that I'd be OK with going to Florida. And she decided that it would be OK because Mayo Clinic is right next to the school that I chose, which was a very happy coincidence."

	"Stars aligned I guess."
	Allison was referred to Mayo Clinic neurosurgeon Dr. Rabih Tawk.
Rabih Tawk, M.D. Neurologic Surgery Mayo Clinic	"Allison was a delightful patient, young patient who comes with her mom, who's a nurse, (and Allison is) extremely anxious about her situation, has the future in front of her and dealing with something like this."
	Dr. Tawk says Allison's cavernoma is not only large, it's located in an area of the brain that's very important to a dancer.
	"With Allison, the lesion is located in her motor cortex, which is the area that controls your body movement."
	Allison noticed her foot, specifically, was being impacted when she did certain dance moves.
Nats foot taps	Dr. Tawk says surgery to remove the lesion, while complex, was an option. But was it the right option for a young woman on the verge of her career in dance?
	"With Allison, we know where the lesion is. We know what to do in surgery exactly. At this stage of her life, there are still some unknowns as to the risk of surgery and what is going to be the consequence for her – for her whole future – and that's why we decided to watch.
	With the expertise and guidance of Dr. Tawk, Allison made a choice.
	"We individualized her care. We check on her every year. We repeat the imaging. Allison knows if something is different, and she knows where to call and what to call. And we know exactly what to do."
	Until that day comes when surgery is needed, Allison dances on.
	"I don't know when will the last time be. It just makes me appreciate it that much more."
	"Haha."
	For the Mayo Clinic News Network, I'm DeeDee Stiepan.