

Running to a new beat: Heart transplant recipient to mark 1-year anniversary with marathon

VIDEO

AUDIO

	<p>If you ask Dawn Mussallem, she defines herself as a mother, wife, daughter and physician.</p> <p>But she's also a cancer survivor and a heart transplant recipient.</p>
<p>Dawn Mussallem, D.O. Heart transplant recipient</p>	<p>“In comparison to how I felt before my heart transplant, I just have this sense of being fully alive.”</p>
	<p>She was diagnosed with stage 4 non-Hodgkin lymphoma in 2000.</p> <p>While chemotherapy, radiation and a bone marrow transplant helped her overcome that illness, she suspects these treatments led to a later diagnosis of heart failure.</p> <p>By December 2019 Mussallem was listed for a heart transplant at the very institution where she works – Mayo Clinic.</p> <p>After more than a year waiting for a match, Mussallem's health worsened, and she was admitted to the hospital.</p> <p>Then, in February 2021, her cardiologist got the call.</p>
	<p>(NATS - Operating room)</p>
	<p>“I named my heart. I named her Grace. And so sometimes I'll just put my hand over my heart. And I will just thank her and thank the donor family because it's just amazing what they gave to me.”</p>
	<p>The transplant was just the beginning of Mussallem’s path to renewed health.</p> <p>Recovery and rehabilitation started immediately.</p>
	<p>“It was incredibly challenging that walk that first walk. I remember how heavy my legs felt. And I thought, oh, my gosh, why is this so hard. But then the next day got easier, and the next day got easier. And so you just have to keep your eye on the prize. And that prize is just so rewarding.”</p>

	<p>Gradually she's gone from walking to running.</p> <p>Mussallem participated in multiple races including a half-marathon in the months that followed.</p>
	<p>"Exercise was just a huge passion of mine. And that was something that got really hijacked with my heart failure."</p>
	<p>Now she's making-up for lost time.</p>
	<p>"I want to make sure that I can take really good care of my heart. I want to make sure that I can embrace my family, do things that are special in life."</p>
	<p>Aiming to run a full marathon on the one-year anniversary of her transplant as a nod to her patients and the donor who saved her life.</p> <p>It's a milestone Mussallem hopes will inspire others to live a healthy life.</p>
	<p>"I'm so excited about this next journey in my life. And I'm just filled with joy over it."</p>
	<p>For the Mayo Clinic News Network, I'm Alex Osiadacz.</p>