# Personal trainer’s two strokes reveal hidden congenital heart defect



An ultra-fit personal trainer from Glasgow is sharing his harrowing experience of suffering two strokes, a shocking twist for someone who has dedicated his life to fitness and health. Stephen Frame, 44, who trains rigorously four times a week and runs his own personal training business, SFrameFit, discovered that the unusual symptoms he attributed to a virus were actually life-threatening strokes.

Weeks before the strokes, Stephen began feeling dizzy and nauseous, symptoms that he initially dismissed. "I just put it down to a virus," he recounted, reflecting on his denial in the face of compelling signs. However, when he had difficulty using his right hand and noticed water spilling when he tried to drink, he confided in a doctor friend who promptly advised him to get medical attention. This timely intervention proved crucial, as scans conducted at the Queen Elizabeth University Hospital revealed that he had suffered two strokes, known as cerebellar infarctions, due to a blockage in the blood supply to his brain.

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of strokes affecting younger, seemingly healthy individuals, often linked to underlying heart conditions like a patent foramen ovale (PFO). This congenital defect allows blood clots to travel to the brain, leading to what are termed cryptogenic strokes—strokes with no immediately identifiable cause. In Stephen's case, scans later revealed that his heart had a gap that had likely existed since birth, posing a significant risk that he had unknowingly lived with for decades. Similar cases have been documented, where young athletes and women—healthy and active—suffered strokes due to the same heart defect. These instances highlight the pressing need for awareness and screening for PFOs, particularly in young adults.

Eventually, Stephen was fitted with a pacemaker after the 28-day heart monitor revealed that his heart was pausing for dangerous lengths during sleep—up to seven seconds. "Had I ignored it any longer, it could have been a completely different story," he emphasised, acknowledging the life-altering nature of his diagnosis. Such findings reiterate the importance of vigilance regarding unexplained symptoms and underscore the critical role of regular check-ups, especially for those with a family history of heart defects.

Since his strokes, Stephen has not been able to work, focusing instead on his recovery supported by his husband, Nick. He is set to undergo surgery to close the heart defect, and his experience serves as a pivotal reminder not only of the unpredictability of health issues but also of the necessity of acting on atypical symptoms, regardless of age or perceived fitness. "If you think something isn't right, no matter what age, or health, you should get checked," he urged.

Stephen’s story is a testament to resilience and the power of advocacy in health. While he faces life with a pacemaker and blood thinners, he remains hopeful for a full recovery. This ordeal has transformed his perspective, making him a beacon of awareness for others. His journey accentuates that even those at the peak of fitness can face unforeseen health crises, urging the larger community to remain alert to their bodies and seek help when something feels amiss.

### Reference Map

1. Lead article - Stephen Frame’s experience and recovery.
2. Related information regarding PFO and strokes in young athletes and adults.
3. Insights on the significance of diagnosing congenital heart defects.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/ultra-fit-personal-trainer-suffers-35230559> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.northwell.edu/news/the-latest/pfo-stroke-young-athlete-treated-northwell-doctors> - A 20-year-old athlete experienced a stroke due to a patent foramen ovale (PFO), a congenital heart defect. Doctors performed a minimally invasive procedure to close the PFO, preventing future strokes. This case highlights the importance of diagnosing and treating PFOs in young individuals to prevent cryptogenic strokes.
3. <https://news.sanfordhealth.org/heart/bismarck-stroke-in-young-people/> - A healthy 20-year-old woman suffered a stroke caused by a PFO. After diagnosis, doctors performed a minimally invasive procedure to close the hole, preventing future strokes. This case underscores the significance of identifying PFOs in young adults to prevent unexplained strokes.
4. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6067806/> - A case report discusses a young patient who suffered a stroke due to tetralogy of Fallot, a congenital heart defect. The report emphasizes the need to consider structural heart diseases in the differential diagnosis of strokes in younger individuals to facilitate early diagnosis and treatment.
5. <https://today.uconn.edu/2022/02/fixing-a-stroke-causing-heart-hole/> - A 55-year-old woman experienced a stroke caused by a PFO. Doctors at UConn Health diagnosed the condition and performed a minimally invasive procedure to close the hole, preventing future strokes. This case highlights the importance of diagnosing and treating PFOs to prevent cryptogenic strokes.
6. <https://www.bswhealth.com/blog/the-heart-brain-connection-how-a-common-heart-defect-affects-your-stroke-risk> - This article explains how a common heart defect, PFO, can increase the risk of stroke in young adults. It discusses the mechanism by which PFO allows blood clots to travel to the brain, leading to strokes, and emphasizes the importance of diagnosing and treating PFOs to prevent cryptogenic strokes.
7. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/adult-congenital-heart-disease/symptoms-causes/syc-20355456> - The Mayo Clinic provides information on congenital heart disease in adults, including complications such as arrhythmias, endocarditis, stroke, pulmonary hypertension, and heart failure. It emphasizes the importance of regular follow-up with a cardiologist for individuals with congenital heart defects to manage and prevent complications.