# Katie Mitchell’s 38-year milestone as UK’s longest-surviving heart and lung transplant recipient



At just 15 years old, Katie Mitchell faced a grim prognosis after suffering irreversible lung damage and heart failure from Eisenmenger syndrome, a rare congenital condition marked by high pulmonary artery blood pressure leading to severe heart and lung complications. Yet, defying the odds, she became the UK’s longest-surviving recipient of a combined heart and lung transplant—a procedure so rare in the country that only about five such surgeries are performed annually.

Mitchell underwent her lifesaving operation at Royal Papworth Hospital in September 1987. Since then, she has not only survived but thrived, marking an extraordinary 38 years post-transplant at the age of 53. Throughout her journey, she has also received two kidney transplants from deceased donors in 1994 and 2015. Mitchell credits the success of her transplant in part to how well her body responds to immunosuppressant medications, although she acknowledges the unpredictable nature of individual reactions to such treatment.

Reflecting on her experience, Mitchell often thinks about the young female donor whose generosity gave her “the gift of a normal life.” She recognises the profound sacrifice made by the donor’s family during a devastating time. Meeting others recently transplanted has been a source of encouragement for young patients and their families, illustrating how transplantation can extend life far beyond the typical five to ten years often anticipated.

The NHS Blood and Transplant service currently reports over 8,000 people on the UK organ transplant waiting list, including a dozen awaiting the rare heart and lung transplant combination. Mitchell’s remarkable longevity is a testament not only to medical advances and donor generosity but also to the resilience and hope of transplant recipients.

Marius Berman, the surgical lead for transplant at Royal Papworth Hospital, highlighted the significance of Mitchell’s milestone, stating it showcases the skill of NHS teams and underscores the vital importance of organ donation.

Mitchell’s story is echoed in the broader history of heart-lung transplantation, such as the landmark successes led by Professor John Wallwork, who performed Europe’s first successful heart-lung transplant in 1984. Mitchell’s own operation came just a few years later, making her one of the youngest patients to undergo the procedure at the time. Now among the longest surviving patients worldwide, she has built a life filled with achievements—a career, marriage, and family—and serves as a beacon of hope for others awaiting similar transplants.

Her journey also highlights the essential role of ongoing support and organ donation awareness to ensure that more lives can be saved and extended through these complex, life-saving procedures. As Mitchell herself confirms, transplantation can indeed enable patients to live full, normal lives.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/oct/13/katie-mitchell-becomes-uk-longest-surviving-heart-and-lung-transplant-recipient), [[2]](https://www.itv.com/news/2025-10-12/woman-becomes-longest-survivor-of-heart-and-lung-transplant)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/oct/13/katie-mitchell-becomes-uk-longest-surviving-heart-and-lung-transplant-recipient), [[3]](https://royalpapworth.nhs.uk/our-hospital/latest-news/woman-celebrates-landmark-35th-anniversary-heart-lung-transplant-reuniting-surgeon), [[5]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-63075587)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/oct/13/katie-mitchell-becomes-uk-longest-surviving-heart-and-lung-transplant-recipient), [[2]](https://www.itv.com/news/2025-10-12/woman-becomes-longest-survivor-of-heart-and-lung-transplant)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/oct/13/katie-mitchell-becomes-uk-longest-surviving-heart-and-lung-transplant-recipient)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/oct/13/katie-mitchell-becomes-uk-longest-surviving-heart-and-lung-transplant-recipient), [[3]](https://royalpapworth.nhs.uk/our-hospital/latest-news/woman-celebrates-landmark-35th-anniversary-heart-lung-transplant-reuniting-surgeon), [[5]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-63075587)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/oct/13/katie-mitchell-becomes-uk-longest-surviving-heart-and-lung-transplant-recipient)
* Paragraph 7 – [[3]](https://royalpapworth.nhs.uk/our-hospital/latest-news/woman-celebrates-landmark-35th-anniversary-heart-lung-transplant-reuniting-surgeon), [[6]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/health/europe-cambridgeshire-london-katie-mitchell-cambridge-b1149436.html), [[7]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/europe-two-cambridgeshire-london-katie-mitchell-b2523356.html)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/oct/13/katie-mitchell-becomes-uk-longest-surviving-heart-and-lung-transplant-recipient> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.itv.com/news/2025-10-12/woman-becomes-longest-survivor-of-heart-and-lung-transplant> - Katie Mitchell, 53, from Sidcup, London, has become the UK's longest-surviving heart and lung transplant recipient. Diagnosed with Eisenmenger syndrome at 11, she underwent a combined transplant at Royal Papworth Hospital in September 1987. Now 53, Mitchell reflects on her journey, expressing gratitude for the 'gift of a normal life' and the donor's family. She also highlights the rarity of the procedure, noting that only about five combined heart and lung transplants are performed annually in the UK. Mitchell has also had two kidney transplants from deceased donors in 1994 and 2015.
3. <https://royalpapworth.nhs.uk/our-hospital/latest-news/woman-celebrates-landmark-35th-anniversary-heart-lung-transplant-reuniting-surgeon> - Katie Mitchell, 50, celebrated the 35th anniversary of her heart-lung transplant by reuniting with her surgeon, Professor John Wallwork, at Royal Papworth Hospital. Diagnosed with Eisenmenger syndrome at 11, she underwent the procedure in 1987 at 15, becoming one of the youngest patients at the time. Now among the longest surviving patients globally for this type of transplant, Mitchell has had a career, married, and had two kidney transplants from deceased donors in 1994 and 2015.
4. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-68733109> - Katie Mitchell, now 51, attended a reunion marking the 40th anniversary of Europe's first successful heart-lung transplant at Royal Papworth Hospital. Diagnosed with Eisenmenger syndrome at 12, she was placed on the transplant waiting list and received a heart-lung transplant in 1987. Reflecting on her journey, Mitchell expressed gratitude for the transplant, stating she never thought she wouldn't get through it and has since led a normal life, including returning to school and working.
5. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-63075587> - Katie Mitchell, 50, was reunited with her surgeon, Professor John Wallwork, 35 years after her heart and lung transplant at Royal Papworth Hospital. Diagnosed with Eisenmenger syndrome at 11, she underwent the procedure in 1987 at 15, becoming one of the youngest patients at the time. Now among the longest surviving patients globally for this type of transplant, Mitchell has led a full life, including returning to school, working, and getting married.
6. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/health/europe-cambridgeshire-london-katie-mitchell-cambridge-b1149436.html> - Professor John Wallwork, who led Europe's first successful heart-lung transplant in 1984, expressed joy at seeing patients like Katie Mitchell lead good lives on the 40th anniversary of the operation. Mitchell, now 51, received her transplant in 1987 and is among the longest survivors globally. Reflecting on her journey, she expressed gratitude for the transplant, stating she never thought she wouldn't get through it and has since led a normal life, including returning to school and working.
7. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/europe-two-cambridgeshire-london-katie-mitchell-b2523356.html> - Professor John Wallwork, who led Europe's first successful heart-lung transplant in 1984, expressed joy at seeing patients like Katie Mitchell lead good lives on the 40th anniversary of the operation. Mitchell, now 51, received her transplant in 1987 and is among the longest survivors globally. Reflecting on her journey, she expressed gratitude for the transplant, stating she never thought she wouldn't get through it and has since led a normal life, including returning to school and working.