

The words all heart patients dread. When I got told this, it came as quite a shock. I was very well and didn't expect it at all.

I had many worries upon hearing these words; would I be in lots of pain afterwards? How long would recovery take? Would I ever recover to full health? - and even (though I thought it unlikely) would I ever wake up?

It is now three months since I had a successful pulmonary valve replacement and I am relieved that it is over and that I am fully recovered! Knowing how uncertain and daunting it is to be waiting for surgery, here are some things that I found helpful for anyone who may face this in the future:

Contacting people who have been through a similar experience.

Although everyone's experience differs slightly, I felt much better prepared after hearing other people's stories. I felt less anxious hearing some positive stories and got some helpful hints beforehand.

Treating myself

From the day I got my date to the day of the operation was a nerve wracking time. I dealt with it by keeping myself busy getting ready for hospital and doing lots of nice things like going to the cinema, catching up with friends, going out for meals etc.

Pre-meds

These were offered either the night before or in the morning before being taken to theatre. I had them the night before, had a good night's sleep and awoke feeling relatively calm considering it was the day of my surgery!

Large pyjamas

Open heart surgery involves breaking the breast bone. Although I didn't find the pain too bad (of course I had lots of good pain relief in hospital), I did find it very uncomfortable. Lots of my movements were restricted at first and getting dressed was difficult. Large pyjamas with buttons down the front made it a lot easier!

"I'M AFRAID YOU NEED AN OPERATION..."

Communication chain

All my friends and family wanted to know how I was doing, so I arranged for my parents to contact 3 friends and my grandmothers, who then passed updates onto other friends and family.

Remembering that each day gets a little bit easier

I wasn't very good at this in the beginning. I remember feeling terrible on the third day. I felt more tired and uncomfortable than I had previously imagined I would. I thought it would take me forever to recover and I felt quite angry about this. However, the next day I felt a bit better and the next day I felt better still. If I could, I would go back and tell myself on the third day that before long I would be feeling better.



Rosie is now enjoying being back at University following her surgery earlier this year

Finally, I would say that open heart surgery is a big procedure but by taking each bit as it comes, it is more manageable (lots of chocolate and presents from friends and family helps too!). Although I hope I never have to have this surgery again I have had a positive experience. I have made friends along the way and feel like I have undertaken a great personal achievement.

Rosie Edwards