

Gym Rat Rantings

by Bob Ring



Lucky in Matters of the Heart

So there I was that Friday morning in late February, exercising on one of the gym's treadmills, happily congratulating myself on getting over my frozen shoulder, when ...

I felt some discomfort in my chest. The discomfort (muscle strain? flu? heart?) continued on and off over the weekend. Since Pat and I were planning a trip to Mexico the next weekend, I went to see my doctor on Monday morning, just to be sure I wasn't coming down with something.

The bad news: The next 48 hours went quickly. My doctor did an EKG and said something like, "Bad news, you've had a heart attack." He had me in a cardiologist's office an hour later. The cardiologist wasn't sure I'd had a heart attack, but suspected a blood clot. At 5:00 am the next morning I was in Tucson Medical Center where they found that I had significant blockages in four heart arteries. In two separate procedures, over two days, the cardiologist implanted three stents to open three of the blockages. On its own, my body had grown two small bypass vessels around the fourth, 100% blockage. Mostly what I remember from two days in the hospital is having to lie still on my back most the time.

The good news: One week after the procedure, the cardiologist did an echocardiogram on me to determine if there had been any permanent heart damage. Thankfully, he concluded that I had "little or no damage," and that my heart's pumping efficiency was just below normal. One week after that I went back to the cardiologist to have a stress test on a treadmill, where they monitor your heart while you walk at increasing speeds and inclines until you're really working. I passed with flying colors! All activity restrictions were lifted and I don't go back to the cardiologist for four months.

Reflection: I was r-e-a-l-l-y lucky. Lucky to get checked out before more serious consequences, lucky that it happened here in Tucson, rather than deep in the Mexico mountains, and lucky that I had good doctors who "jumped on my case." Last month, talking about my shoulder, I was kidding about a "miracle of medical science." This month, I'm not kidding about that.

Two more thoughts: Pat and I truly believe that my overall good physical condition from exercising here in the gym was a big help in getting me through this relatively easily. Moral: Listen to your body.