

German making progress after double arm transplant

July 22 2009, By MARY LANE , Associated Press Writer

(AP) -- The recipient of the world's first complete double arm transplant scratched his head and back and beamed at his doctors Wednesday, saying he was on the path to independence a year after the pioneering operation.

Farmer Karl Merk, who lost his arms just below the shoulder in a 2002 combine harvester accident, demonstrated the progress he has made by scratching the back of his head with his right hand and squeezing rubber discs at a press conference near his home in southern Germany.

In July 2008 he underwent a 15-hour surgery at the Munich University Clinic by a team of 40 doctors, nurses and anesthesiologists.

His doctors originally thought it would take up to two years before the nerves in his arm would regrow sufficiently to permit movement, but the 55-year-old has made more progress than expected through an intensive program of physiotherapy and electric stimulation.

"My biggest dream is just that my [fingers](#) will keep improving, that I can pick things up and just be self-reliant again," he told reporters.

Wearing a black short-sleeved shirt that clearly showed where the arms were connected, Merk demonstrated how he can wave them without the aid of the numerous braces and bandages he needed after surgery.

Merk and his doctors said they hope his story will serve as an inspiration

for others who might need such a [surgery](#), but have hesitated to go forward.

"I would have this operation again in an instant," Merk said.

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