

Heart problem forced her baby to be delivered early. Then came a steeper challenge

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Heart transplant survivor Kayde Wolf with her husband, Kevin, and son, Carter.
Photo courtesy: Kayde Wolf

One night after work, on her way up three flights of stairs to her apartment, Kayde Wolf paused on every landing to catch her breath. In her 20s, fit and healthy, she didn't understand what was happening.

The next day, Kayde felt lethargic and anxious. Her heart pounded so furiously that she could see it moving her chest.

Tests revealed she had an enlarged heart caused by an inflammation known as viral myocarditis. This reduced her heart's ability to pump oxygen to the rest of her body, triggering her symptoms.

A cardiologist told her that medication would get her back to normal. Eventually, it did. When she and her husband Kevin said they were ready to start a family, doctors said her heart would not be a problem.

And it wasn't, until the 37th week of her pregnancy.

Kayde woke up early one morning and didn't feel right. No matter how she positioned herself, she struggled to breathe.

"This wasn't just pregnancy," she said.

She was in [heart failure](#). The next morning, doctors performed a cesarean section, delivering a healthy boy.

Again, Kayde was prescribed medication and rest. Recovery came slower this time, which was especially excruciating because her newborn son Carter needed her. Yet Kayde was too weak to stand while holding him. She couldn't even change diapers for several weeks.

"The hardest part of all of this was watching somebody practically raise my infant," Kayde said.

Another hard part: Kayde was told not to try having more children. Her heart couldn't handle it.

The challenges, however, were only beginning.

The medication that had fought off her [heart problem](#) years before did not work this time. After seeing a variety of doctors, she learned that she was born with a condition called left ventricular non-compaction cardiomyopathy. In simplest terms, a portion of her heart never properly developed. This was preventing her heart from healing, the cardiologist told her.

A [heart transplant](#) would be the only way to save her life.

"I lost it," said Kayde, who was 28 and the mother of a 6-month-old.

"It was like a kick to the gut," Kevin said.

Kayde's health deteriorated as she waited for a [donor heart](#). Unable to walk, her skin turned pale and cold to the touch, she checked into a hospital for round-the-clock care. She and Kevin were forced to face the possibility she might not survive.

"Every night I said goodbye, I hoped it wasn't the last time I would speak to her," he said.

The good news came weeks later. Kayde had enough time to see her son before getting wheeled into surgery. When she eventually regained consciousness, Kayde's face was pink, her fingers warm. Soon, she felt more energy than she had in months.

"They couldn't have asked for a better match for my body," Kayde said.
"I was bound and determined to get on my feet and learn how to walk

again."

Now a stay-at-home mom to 4-year-old Carter, Kayde shares her story whenever possible. She has become involved with both the Texas Heart Institute and the American Heart Association. She recently participated as a fashion model for the organization's Go Red For Women event in Austin, Texas.

"Growing up, our high school rival's color was red, so I never wore it," Kayde said. "Now I have a whole section of my closet that's red."

Her blog is called A Grateful Heart, encapsulating her state of mind. After all, she's thankful for so much: her [heart](#) donor, the doctors and her family. She feels gratitude for the little things, too—a delicious meal or just a lovely summer day.

Because of the medication she takes, she can no longer swim in community pools or be in the sun uncovered, but Kayde and her family still spend plenty of time outdoors. Fishing, swimming and attending football games at their alma mater, Texas A&M, are a few of their favorite activities.

"I'm completely back to normal," she said, "but it's a new normal."

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