

Double-lung transplant, breast implants save life of man who battled vaping-linked illness

November 8 2023, by Dennis Thompson



"Davey" Bauer hovered on the precipice of death, his lungs damaged by vaping and congested by antibiotic-resistant pneumonia.

Doctors saved his life with a jury-rigged artificial lung, a prompt double-lung transplant... and a set of DD breast implants.

Doctors at Northwestern Medicine crafted an artificial lung to keep Bauer, 34, alive after removing lungs so heavily infected that "they started to liquify," said [Dr. Rade Tomic](#), medical director of the [Northwestern Medicine Canning Thoracic Institute Lung Transplant Program](#) in Chicago.

"If you looked at his X-ray, there was nothing left—the lungs were completely filled with pus," Tomic said in a Northwestern news release.

But the [doctors](#) also needed a way to keep Bauer's heart from collapsing inside his [chest cavity](#) after his infected lungs were removed.

That's where the DD breast implants came into play.

"I never imagined we'd be using DD breast implants to help bridge a patient to lung transplantation, but our team is known for taking on the most difficult cases and thinking outside the box to save lives," said [Dr. Ankit Bharat](#), chief of thoracic surgery at Northwestern Medicine.

The innovative procedure happened in late May, after Bauer, 34, developed an antibiotic-resistant lung infection following a bout with the flu.

Bauer works in landscaping and hardscaping in DeSoto, Mo., and he also enjoys snowboarding, skateboarding, gaming and golfing.

But Bauer is also a longtime smoker. He started smoking cigarettes at 21 and typically smoked a pack a day until he switched to vaping in 2014.

"Vaping felt better, and I thought it was the healthier alternative, but in

all honesty, I found it more addicting than cigarettes," Bauer said.

Initially, Bauer experienced shortness of breath from his infection, but it quickly escalated. He was admitted to a St. Louis hospital and placed on ECMO, a device that does the work of the heart and lungs.

Bauer continued to decline, and it became clear that a double-lung transplant was his only hope for survival. Unfortunately, his infection made him a poor candidate for transportation, let alone transplantation.

"When we received a call from Davey's medical team in St. Louis, we thought we could help him, but it was also very clear he wouldn't survive the transplant in his current condition," Tomic said. "He needed to clear the infection before we could list him for transplant, but the only way to do that was to remove both lungs."

Bauer's surgical team cooked up a strategy to remove the infected lungs and replace them with an engineered "[artificial lung](#)" that would keep oxygen flowing to his brain and organs. Breast implants would be used to support his heart until new lungs could be transplanted.

"One of our [plastic surgeons](#) was very gracious to give us a rapid-fire course on the different types, shapes and sizes of breast implants, so we picked out a couple options and some of them were easier than others to mold inside Davey's chest, with the DD option being the best fit," Bharat said.

Surgeons removed the infected lungs on May 26, and Bauer's body immediately began clearing the infection.

"Still to this day, I can't believe Davey lived without any lungs. He was breathing, blood pumping, without lungs," said Bauer's girlfriend and caretaker, Susan Gore. "While we waited inside his hospital room at

Northwestern, I would take a breath in and say, 'one breath for me and one for Davey.'" It's hard to wrap my mind around it, and I'm still in awe that Davey was able to do this—it truly shows his strength."

Doctors put him on the list for a lung transplant that day, and within 24 hours a set of donor lungs became available.

On May 28, doctors removed the [breast implants](#) and implanted the donor lungs. Bauer spent several months recovering in an ICU before being discharged to rehabilitation in late September.

Bauer will remain in Chicago for the next year so his transplant team can continue to closely monitor him.

Bauer, who jokes that his new nickname is "DD Davey," blames his years of smoking and vaping for his near-fatal illness.

"While we don't have definitive ways of proving my years of vaping caused my [medical condition](#), doctors do know for a fact that vaping causes [lung](#) injury," Bauer said. "If I could go back in time, I never would have picked up a cigarette or vape pen, and I hope my story can help encourage others to quit, because I wouldn't wish this difficult journey on anyone."

More information: Johns Hopkins has more about [lung transplants](#).

Copyright © 2023 [HealthDay](#). All rights reserved.

Citation: Double-lung transplant, breast implants save life of man who battled vaping-linked illness (2023, November 8) retrieved 28 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-11-double-lung-transplant-breast-implants-life.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.