

Hi, I am Nick Sloop and I want to share my story about my diagnosis of IPF (Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis). IPF is a progressive disease that causes scarring of the lung tissue with no known cause. I spent 35 years in Missouri Public Education; I taught Physical Education, coached Cross Country and Track. Through the years, as a recreational runner, I ran many 5K and 10K runs. I was in good health and good physical condition and lived a healthy lifestyle. I never smoked and was never exposed to toxins or chemicals.

I was still running at the age of 70 when I developed an awful cough in January 2016. I was able to recover from that cough. Then in May, the cough returned and shortness of breath. We were able to see my doctor and we decided for me to go to Liberty Hospital to the Emergency Room to be checked. My oxygen levels were low and I underwent a number of tests that showed what I was dealing with. I was able to see the Pulmonologist at the hospital the next morning and he explained to me that I had IPF. He indicated a new FDA-approved medication that had been out for two years that had shown positive results at slowing the progression of the fibrosis. When we left the hospital I was being approved for the medication and scheduled for pulmonary rehab the next week. I feel like so many positives happened that day in regards to my diagnosis and treatment.

I started this medication within a couple of weeks after leaving the hospital. My pulmonologist shared that some patients' conditions had improved on the medication. My wife, Barbara, and I decided to "lock" on to those words, "conditions had improved." I went home without oxygen, but I did breathing treatments for two months.

When I started Rehab, I required oxygen to exercise. I slowly increased my workout time and intensity. After I finished my prescribed 36 sessions of pulmonary rehabilitation, I signed up for the self-pay maintenance program for rehabilitation patients. I continued with this until the gym closed due to Covid-19. The last three years I walked in the Liberty Hospital Jewell 5K race. The first year it was myself and a Respiratory Therapist who walked with me. The second year 5 of us walked and the third year 12 participated, 4 of us from rehab.

One of the most important things that have come from this life changing experience is that maintaining a healthy life is so important. One day at rehab a Respiratory Therapist stated that so simply to me. He said, I feel like you have shown me that making your health a priority can have a positive effect on your life if something happens with your health; then your body is more capable to deal with these health situations. I was fortunate when the pulmonary fibrosis began I was in good physical condition and did not have any underlying health conditions; therefore I responded well to the medication. I believe that my background in health and physical education and coaching had a positive influence on how I approached rehab. My experience in rehab has been significant in maintaining a level of physical fitness and learning how to manage the limitations that the fibrosis has placed on my physical being.

Yes, my life has changed since my diagnosis. I can no longer just run or run in races. But, that's ok. It takes me longer to do some tasks and I do have to slow down and think about what I am doing, especially **breathing**. I feel very fortunate with my story.