

## Mike's Story

I was struggling with fatty liver disease since I was very young because I was borderline obese. It was discovered one day by accident when I was starting high school. My mother was doing a check up via ultrasound. The doctor suggested that I should have a check up too. It was then I found out I had fatty liver disease - I was 13 years old.



Since then, a heavy burden of weight kept me down. I had some insecurity issues and not to mention, year after year, the depressing thought of having the disease. Despite knowing, I still did not pay attention to my body, my health and particularly, my liver because I didn't experience any specific signs or symptoms relating to the disease. Other than feeling tired at times, I didn't feel sick at all.

Until six years later when I started university. One night when I got home after school at 2:00 am, without any prior signs or symptoms, I suddenly turned very sick, and couldn't move. I was sent to the Emergency immediately. I was suffering from an infection and had internal bleeding for three days. At that moment, I really thought I was going to die but I had so many things I wanted to accomplish in life. The doctor told me there was no medication for fatty liver disease. If I continued not to take care of my liver, my condition could result in cirrhosis, and there would be an increased risk of liver cancer! I don't want to have liver cancer. I don't want to die! The only way for me to get rid of the fat in my liver is to start exercising and adopting a healthy diet.

So I decided that I needed to make a change.

I started running - something I had never done before. I began with 2 km, then 4 km. I had the completion of the 10 km Vancouver Sun Run, non-stop, as a goal. I practiced that tirelessly and I achieved that in 2013!

I fell in love with exercising, especially running. I thought I should challenge myself more. I signed myself up for the 2013 Scotiabank Vancouver Half Marathon. For that, I trained tirelessly, and even though I was unable to run a full 21 km non-stop, I was able to finish it with some walking. After the half-marathon, I challenged myself to do 50 Grouse Grinds [a 2.9 km trail up the face of Grouse Mountain]. I was able to achieve that over the span of two months -- sometimes doing two Grouse Grinds a day in six days, back to back! After that, I decided to take on the grand daddy of all races - the Vancouver Full Marathon. It was very difficult because being at 42.2 km, it was not an easy beast and I had a lot of doubts. I decided to not think about what I can't do and decided to focus on what I can do, and I told myself as long as I try my best, I am happy. I am proud to say that I was able to finish my first full marathon at 3 hours and 42 minutes, under pouring rain!



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By that time, which was 18 months after I made that decision in the hospital bed of taking my health in control, I had lost 40 pounds. It was time for the yearly check up with the doctor for an ultrasound follow-up on my liver. To my surprise, my test results came back as negative for fatty liver disease! It was a relief and amazing feeling to get this off my back.

I continued to train for many half and full marathons and challenge myself to be a faster and better runner. I started getting involved with the Canadian Liver Foundation in 2014 to help raise awareness for fatty liver disease, especially among children. According to the Canadian Liver Foundation, fatty liver disease is currently the most common form of liver disease in Canada. It is poised to take over from hepatitis C as the leading cause of liver transplants.

I hope by sharing my story I can further inspire those who are struggling with the fatty liver disease, and liver diseases in general, to not lose hope. I hope that I can share my passion in supporting the great work that the Canadian Liver Foundation is doing -- the work that will continue to benefit those living with liver disease and the general public with awareness and new research and cures for all forms of liver diseases.