



By Adrian Miller
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Thirteen years ago, I thought my story was over before it really began. I was walking with my brother on Super Bowl Sunday in February

2012, following our tradition of visiting neighborhood bars before heading to our parents' house. But that day, I couldn't even make it a block without stopping to catch my breath. I was gasping for air like I'd just run a marathon. Deep down, I knew something was seriously wrong.

The next morning, I asked my sister to take me to the emergency room. When they checked my blood pressure – 260 over 170 – I was on the verge of a stroke. By 3:00 that afternoon, I had tubes in my chest and was connected to a dialysis machine. I didn't even know what dialysis was.

My kidneys had failed due to years of heavy drinking and drug use, combined with dangerously high blood pressure. That day in the hospital, as I faced the reality of what my life had become, I made myself a promise: never again would I touch drugs or alcohol. My family had heard this before and didn't believe me, but I meant it. I have been sober since that day, which is why I believe that having kidney failure saved my life. It helped me discover a new philosophy I live by: just focus on getting through today, and I'll worry about tomorrow, tomorrow.

During my six and a half years on dialysis, I faced serious complications. I had a stroke. I went into cardiac arrest. But I also discovered something powerful – my life didn't have to stop because of kidney failure.

I got a part-time job at 24 Hour Fitness and threw myself into getting healthy. I started by walking on a treadmill for just five minutes. The next week, I pushed for eight minutes. Then I added weights and circuit training. Over time, I lost more than 100 pounds. I measured every ounce of water I drank. I did my best to keep a disciplined diet and eat the same foods every single day that were renal friendly – I wasn't perfect, but I was committed to maintaining healthy habits.

I want anyone reading this to understand: just because you have kidney failure doesn't mean your life has to stop. You choose what you want to do. If you follow the rules – watch your fluid intake, eat renal-friendly



ONE DAY AT A TIME

Life Beyond Kidney Failure

foods, take your binders – you can still live productively. Even on dialysis, I was able to coach baseball. It wasn't easy, but it's my passion, and it keeps me connected to something bigger than my illness.

My transplant call came in 2018 while I was actually sitting in a dialysis chair. The nurse looked at me with the biggest smile when Oregon Health & Science University called to say I needed to get off the machine immediately – they had a kidney for me. Everything moved in slow motion until I got to the hospital, then it was like warp speed. I remember getting on the gurney and counting backwards from ten. I probably didn't make it to nine. When I woke up, I had a new kidney.

The surgery wasn't without complications – I had internal bleeding from a cut in the main renal line and needed a second operation. But I made it through. What keeps me going every day is my family. I have a daughter, two grandsons, and my wife Renée, who I married four years ago. I know they need me here. Going back to my old life is not an option.

My routine isn't for everyone – I went to extremes with exercise and diet discipline. I ate the same renal-friendly foods every day for six years. Being raised in a Hispanic family, giving up cheeses and milk was hard because they're part of our culture, but I did it because I wanted to live.

The most important lesson I want to share is this: kidney failure is not a death sentence. You're not dead when you're on dialysis. However you decide to handle your situation is up to you, but if you decide you want to live, you're going to have to make some changes. Those changes are for the best.

Create routines that work for you. Become a creature of habit with the things that keep you healthy. Follow your doctor's directions as closely as you can. Start small – whether it's exercise, dietary changes, or managing your fluid intake – and build from there.

Every morning when I wake up, I start over. I focus on getting through today, and when tomorrow comes, I'll tackle that too. Thirteen years later, I'm still here. I'm still sober. I'm still fighting. And I'm surrounded by people who love me and need me to keep going.

If you're reading this and you're scared, overwhelmed, or feeling like giving up – don't. Your life doesn't have to stop because of kidney disease. Take it one day at a time, make the changes you need to make, and remember: you get to choose how to live your life, even with kidney failure.

Just get through today. Tomorrow, we'll start again.