

KATIE FERRARI

PANCREAS AFTER KIDNEY (PAK) TRANSPLANT AT UPMC



For the first eight years of her life, Katie was a happy and healthy little girl. So when she began to rapidly lose weight and passed out at her own birthday party, her family knew something was wrong. Katie soon was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes. “When I was diagnosed in 1995, my parents and I didn’t know much about diabetes,” Katie says.

Type 1 diabetes is a condition where the pancreas doesn’t make insulin or makes very little insulin. Insulin helps blood sugar enter the cells in the body to create energy. Without insulin, blood sugar can’t get into cells and build up in the bloodstream. High blood sugar is damaging to the body and causes many of the symptoms and complications of diabetes, including fatigue, blurry vision, weight loss, and frequent urination. Type 1 diabetes is relatively uncommon. Only 5 to 10% of people with diabetes have type 1 diabetes.

Born and raised in Palm Bay, Fl., Katie found that not many children her age had diabetes like she did.

“It’s more normalized now, but throughout my elementary, middle, and high school years, I was embarrassed to be a type 1 diabetic. I was on insulin injections and not a lot of people even knew I was diabetic. I didn’t check my blood sugars. I tried to fit in, so I would hide my diagnosis, which led me to neglect my health.”

After college, Katie moved to Pittsburgh with her family. In 2012, she booked a primary care appointment, where she received unsettling news.

“My doctor told me that my lab results were really bad and that I needed to see a nephrologist. At that appointment, I was diagnosed with stage four kidney failure.”

Stage four of chronic kidney disease (CKD) means that you have severe loss of kidney function. Katie’s kidneys were functioning at about 15-29% of normal kidney function.

“I was put on medication to prevent going on dialysis, but after five years, my kidney function declined to the point that my kidneys failed and I needed to have a life-saving kidney transplant,” Katie says. “Because of the diabetes and the significant damage that it did to my body at such an early age, I was really sick. It even caused blindness in my right eye.”

Following her kidney transplant, Katie was placed on the list at UPMC for an isolated pancreas transplant.

During this time, her diabetes was still uncontrolled because she was unaware of when her blood sugars would drop. During the night when she would sleep, her blood sugars would drastically decline.

Candidates for pancreas transplantation generally have type 1 diabetes, usually along with kidney damage, nerve damage, eye problems, or another complication of the disease. Katie’s doctors decided that because of her declining blood sugars, as well as the trauma that the diabetes caused, she was a candidate for a pancreas-only transplant.

Continued on back

The Path to Pancreas Transplant at UPMC

As one of the nation's most active transplant programs, UPMC has extensive experience in pancreas transplants. For more than 40 years, UPMC experts have led the development of therapies and innovative treatment options to enhance the quality of life of adult and pediatric patients. Because of this, Katie knew she was in good hands.

On Aug. 31, 2023, she underwent the transplant at UPMC Montefiore.

"I had dreamt about this moment since I was 8 years old," Katie says. "I felt like I was deteriorating at only 36 years old."



IT FEELS SO GOOD TO HAVE A SECOND CHANCE AT LIFE.

— Katie Ferrari

A pancreas transplant can offer a potential cure for diabetes, and it can slow down the damage that it does to the body. A successful pancreas transplant can slow down the effect of the damage that diabetes has caused to the eyes, nerves, and blood vessels. After a pancreas transplant, most patients have much better blood sugar control. There is usually no need for insulin injections or regular blood sugar tests, and patients are at a much lower risk of low blood sugars.

Life After Transplant

After the transplant, Katie was discharged from the hospital within a week. After she was discharged, she stayed with her mom in Munhall, Pa., who served as her caregiver while she continued to recover from the transplant.

"It feels so good to have a second chance at life. I've never been given the opportunity to have a normal life. Given the fact that hardly anyone even gets pancreas-only transplants, I feel so lucky and blessed."

Now, Katie lives a normal life post-transplant. She spends her time with her toddler son, husband, and family

Katie's treatment and results may not be representative of other cases.

Why Choose UPMC?

For many, transplant is a viable option for a better life. At UPMC, we provide transplant options to all patients who will benefit. As one of the nation's most active and experienced transplant programs, the UPMC Kidney and Pancreas Transplant Program has vast experience in kidney, pancreas, and combined kidney-pancreas transplants. From thorough evaluation to world-class treatment, we provide a patient-centered approach to care throughout the entire transplant process. We take pride in keeping the lines of communication open with patients, families, referring providers, and transplant case managers regarding status procedures, treatments, and follow-up care. Although transplantation is a complex, serious procedure, we maintain a personal, patient-focused approach that takes into consideration the stress and concerns many individuals experience.

UPMC Kidney and Pancreas Transplant Program

UPMC Montefiore

7 South
3459 Fifth Ave.
Pittsburgh, PA 15213
412-647-5800
UPMCKidneyreferrals@upmc.edu

For more information about pancreas transplantation, please visit UPMC.com/Pancreas.