

# AUTUMN AND MIKE

## PEDIATRIC LIVING-DONOR LIVER TRANSPLANT PATIENT STORY

Autumn Pillman came face-to-face with one of life's toughest battles at an early age. At only nine weeks old, Autumn was fighting for her life after being diagnosed with biliary atresia, an obstruction of the bile ducts that can be deadly and lead to cirrhosis of the liver if left untreated.

**Autumn's parents**, Mike and Kailey, realized that they might not see Autumn live the playful, joyful life that other children have the opportunity of experiencing.

Time was of the essence, but there was one suitable person who wanted nothing more than to be Autumn's hero and donate part of his liver to help save her life.

Her father.

### **The Path to Living-Donor Liver Transplant at UPMC Children's**

"You can't begin to imagine watching your child deteriorate right in front of your eyes and feel completely helpless," said Kailey.

After researching different options of where to take Autumn for a transplant evaluation, the St. Louis family packed up their belongings and boarded a flight to meet with the team at UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh.

"Once we did some research and saw that UPMC Children's was an option, it opened up our eyes and gave us hope at a time where Autumn really started to deteriorate," said Mike.



After doctors at UPMC Children's determined that Autumn did need a liver transplant, her father jumped at the opportunity to be the living donor for their little girl.

During a pediatric living-donor liver transplant, a portion of a healthy liver from a family member, friend, or a non-directed donor is removed and transplanted into a child to replace their unhealthy liver. This is possible because of the liver's unique ability to regenerate or grow back. This option allows a child to receive a transplant sooner than they would if they were waiting for an organ from a deceased donor.

In the following weeks, Autumn's condition worsened, and her family knew that time was running out.

"She just laid around a lot not doing much, had little energy and just wasn't herself," said Kailey.

After numerous tests and assessments, his evaluation was a success and Mike was able to donate a portion of his left liver to Autumn just a few weeks later.

"This was not an easy process but UPMC did everything they could and gave us all the resources to make sure the procedure went as best as it could," said Kailey.

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## WE HAVE OUR CHILD THRIVING AND ENJOYING LIFE, AND THAT'S ALL WE WANTED.

— Mike Pillman

### The Result

Autumn and Mike both had successful surgeries and are now, “thriving,” as one big, happy family. Autumn just celebrated her seventh birthday in December 2025 and her parents could not be more thankful.

“If it weren’t for the physicians and the staff at UPMC, I don’t think Autumn would be alive right now,” Kailey said.

“They gave us our daughter back,” Mike added.

After learning how serious Autumn’s condition was, Mike and Kailey stress how important it is for people to register to become organ donors.

“You don’t realize how important organ donation is until it hits home, and it doesn’t take much to sign up and become an organ donor,” said Kailey.

The Pillmans desired one thing out of life. And that was life itself.

“We have our child thriving and enjoying life and that’s all we wanted,” said Mike.

“We are forever grateful to UPMC,” Kailey added.

### Why Choose UPMC Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh?

Children with liver disease or liver failure have hope at UPMC Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh. Since 1988, our surgeons have performed more than 1,270 deceased-donor liver transplants and more than 215 living-donor liver transplants. Our skilled team of liver transplant surgeons take on some of the most complex cases.

UPMC Children’s is home to the oldest pediatric transplant center in the country. We take pride in keeping the lines of communication open with patients, families, and referring physicians 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 families experience.

### Contact UPMC Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh

Phone: **412-692-6110**

Email: [PedsTxInquiry@upmc.edu](mailto:PedsTxInquiry@upmc.edu)

Fax: **412-692-6116**

Office hours: Monday – Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. EST

After-hours physician referral service: 1-877-640-6746

### UPMC Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh

One Children’s Way

4401 Penn Ave.

Pittsburgh, PA 15224

**For more information about pediatric liver transplant, please visit [CHP.edu/Transplant](http://CHP.edu/Transplant) or call **412-692-6110**.**