

## 'Stem cells grew me a new heart' says Gordon Foster after treatment on 'compassionate' grounds

By [Allison Coggan](#) | Posted: February 07, 2017

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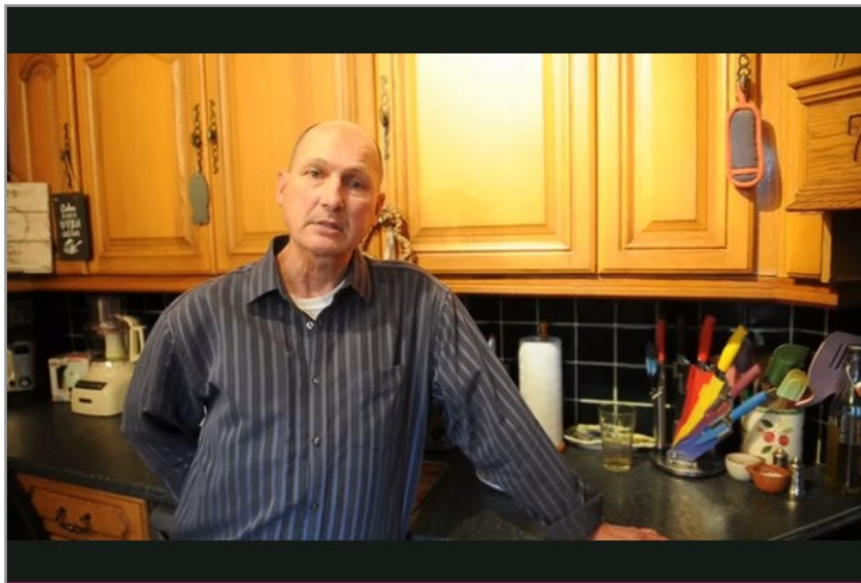


An East Yorkshire dad who missed out on a heart transplant by just one per cent has become the first patient in Europe to undergo revolutionary treatment on compassionate grounds.

Gordon Foster suffered his first heart attack at 30 and went on to have two major and several smaller heart attacks which caused severe damage to his heart muscle.

Yet, despite his heart working at only 17 per cent of its normal function, he missed out on a [heart transplant](#) because it was just above the threshold of 16 per cent.

### Watch Gordon describe his life-changing treatment



Now, Gordon has become the first patient to undergo stem cell treatment to regenerate part of his dead heart muscle through the new Compassionate Treatment Programme, the first of its kind in Europe, at the world-famous St Bartholomew's Hospital in London.

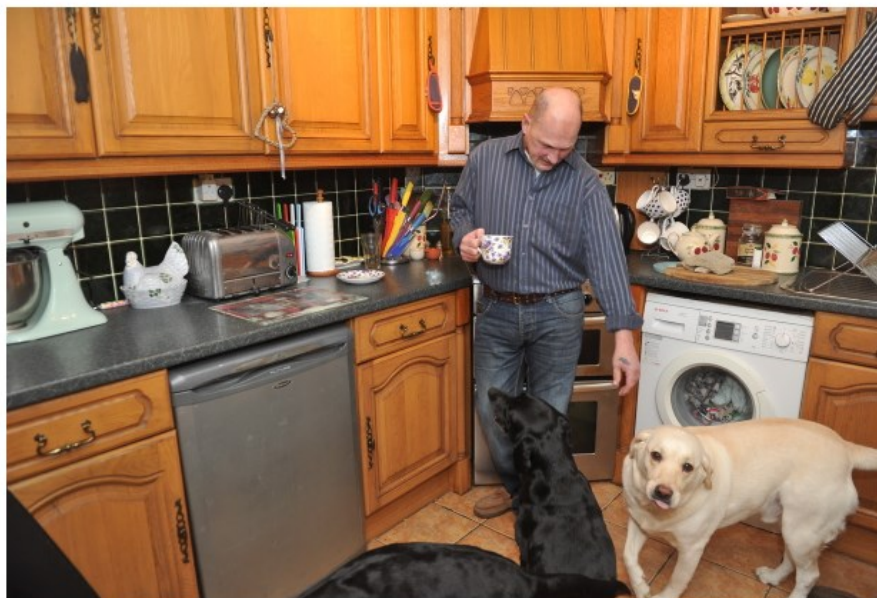
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At his home in the hamlet of Thornholme near [Bridlington](#), Gordon, 59, said: "I thought last year would be my last. Now, I have so much hope for the future.

"I have had the best care I could ever wish for from the NHS. I can't believe how lucky I've been. Someone up there must be looking out for me."

Gordon developed cancer when he was 22 and believes his illness may have been linked to his father's work for the RAF [testing British nuclear weapons in Christmas Island](#) in the 1950s. Around 21,000 British servicemen were exposed to explosions wearing no protective clothing and dressed in khaki desert fatigues.

He said: "I remember as a child, the radio used to crackle when my dad walked past and when he died, he was riddled with cancer."



RECOVERING: Gordon Foster is now back at home in Thornholme

Gordon underwent intensive radiotherapy which may have damaged his heart and suffered the major heart attack eight years later as he renovated his home for him and his bride-to-be Joanne. The couple brought forward their wedding day in case he did not survive.

However, they went on to have two children – James, now 25, and Rebekah, 23, – but Mr Foster's health declined over the years despite him throwing himself into his job as a welder fabricator for structural steel firm Severfield Reeve.

"I worked in heavy industry, handing upside down off beams welding, and I was putting in 110-hour weeks, often away from home for seven weeks at a time," he said.

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"I just got it into my head that I had to prove to people that I wasn't on the scrap heap and threw myself into work. With hindsight, it was the wrong thing to do."

After experiencing more heart attacks and being told by a cardiology specialist he needed a heart transplant, Gordon went to Papworth Hospital in Cambridgeshire. Tests showed his heart function rate was 17 per cent, just one per cent too high for a heart transplant.

He said: "It was a very humbling experience. I thought I had it bad but when I saw some of the other patients, it was unbelievable how sick they were.

"I thought they were far more deserving than me and I would have felt guilty if they had put me on the transplant list."

So, Gordon soldiered on, his health deteriorating by the day. And he sank into a deep depression as his life became more restrictive. Despite his employers changing his role several times in an attempt to reduce his workload, he had to give up work on medical grounds about 10 years ago.

At home, a stair lift was fitted and his home was adapted because he ended up with terrible pains in his chest and on his knees by the time he reached the top of the stairs.



SO GRATEFUL: Gordon Foster can't thank the NHS enough

Five years ago, Gordon was invited to take part in a Stem Cell Research Trial, funded by the Heart Cells Foundation, to help patients with heart failure. However, he was selected at random as part of the group receiving a placebo so his condition did not improve.

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However, in September, the Stem Cell Research Team invited him back down to St Bart's to see if he was suitable for treatment under its new Compassionate Treatment Programme and treatment began in November.

Jenifer Rosenberg, chairwoman of the Heart Cells Foundation, said the programme's aim was to treat patients with severe heart disease with stem cell therapy on compassionate grounds to give them back their lives.

For five days, Gordon had injections to stimulate the growth of his own stem cells and on the sixth day, the team extracted bone marrow from the bottom of his back.



REGENERATE: Pure stem cells were put into Gordon's heart muscle

His bone marrow was sent by express courier across London to a laboratory where scientists extracted stem cells which were then put straight into the dead section of Gordon's heart muscle in an attempt to regenerate it. And it worked.

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"When I got back home, I felt really good," he said. "I could walk up the stairs without getting the pain and it was so marvellous."

Although he still has a lung condition and is **[about to begin another trial at Castle Hill Hospital in Cottingham](#)** to help his breathing, his heart continues to repair itself thanks to the stem cell treatment.

He said: "I will forever be thankful to the Heart Cells Foundation and the team at St Bart's. Without them, I wouldn't be here today and I'm enjoying every moment I spend with my wife and my children.

"Not only has the stem cell treatment I received helped to improve my physical health, but it has also massively improved my mental health and I now live every day with hope for the future."

Consultant cardiologist Professor Anthony Mathur, a director of interventional cardiology at St Bart's, said: "The launch of the programme is a momentous milestone in our research and Gordon's story proves just how important it is to offer cell therapy to those who have no other medical choice.

"With more than one million people suffering with heart disease and failure in the UK, the need for treatment in this field has never been greater.

"We hope to lead the way to the treatment ultimately being available to thousands of other patients through the NHS so we can help people like Gordon to lead near normal lives again."

Visit [here](#) to donate to Heart Cells Foundation and the Compassionate Treatment Programme.