The Gayfer family story.
Fit and healthy, former AFL player Mick Gayfer was 48 years old when a devastating heart condition almost took his life.

It was a regular night in May last year when Mick went to bed, setting his alarm for 6am so he could get up and go to the gym. With no history of heart problems and feeling fine, Mick never expected that this could have been the night his life ended.

At 2am in the morning, his wife Dee awoke to Mick moaning in his sleep. Initially nudging him and telling him to be quiet it wasn’t until he didn’t stop that she got up and turned the light on and saw him laying there, white as a ghost, in a pool of sweat and complaining of chest pain. It was then that Dee called an ambulance that arrived a speedy eight minutes later.

As Mick explained;

“As soon as the MICA Ambulance arrived, they determined it was ventricular tachycardia which is bad news. The doctors told me later that it was probably my fitness levels that kept me from going into full cardiac arrest.”

Whilst Mick was lucky to avoid a sudden cardiac arrest that night, his life has changed dramatically since.

12 weeks after the initial incident, after no exercise and heart medication, I went into hospital for a cardiac MRI. The next day I got a call from the doctor who said I needed to come in immediately. I was told there had been no improvement to my heart and that if I had another episode I could go into cardiac arrest. The following week I had an internal defibrillator put in.

The defibrillator keeps track of my heart rate and will try to restore my heart rate to normal if I have another ventricular tachycardia or bring me back to life if I go into cardiac arrest.”
Since the incident what areas have changed in your life?

My life has changed significantly. Being so active my entire life, I’ve had to really cut back on exercise. Initially it was nothing, but now I’m back riding again with my cycling group. It’s been tough. I’m now riding shorter distances and a lot slower. I’ve really had to change my mentality, but what’s important is that I’m still alive. It’s had a toll on my family too. I often work back late in the office and my wife was initially worried that if something happened, I might be there by myself.

– Mick Gayfer
Husband, father, ex AFL footballer
How did your daughters react to their father’s heart arrhythmia?

I am just so glad the girls didn’t wake up on the night it all happened. The ambulance officers had four attempts at putting in a cannula so there was blood everywhere, Mick had wires all over him and an oxygen mask, I can’t imagine how they would have felt if they walked in to see that.

My daughters, Charley, Ally and Millie, have been worried something might happen again too. But as time has passed and they know Mick is looking after himself, we’ve all really relaxed a lot more.

– Dee Gayfer
Mother and loving wife of 25 years
What do you worry about most?

Dad’s heart condition is just always in the back of my mind. For a while after it all happened, if dad didn’t answer his phone straight away I’d get worried but now I understand that he’s doing everything he can to make sure it doesn’t happen again.

It’s been a family tradition for my sisters to do the Great Victorian Bike Ride with dad when they were in grade 6 and I was too scared to do it last year. I was worried that if something happened to his heart in the night, I wouldn’t know what to do. Hopefully we can do it this year instead.

– Millie Gayfer
Mick’s youngest daughter, 13 years old
Since being diagnosed, I’ve read a lot about medical research to find out more about how and why heart arrhythmias happen. People often think that heart disease only affects those that lead an unhealthy lifestyle but I’m proof that it really can happen to anyone.

– Mick Gayfer
Husband, father, ex AFL footballer

The development of new medical treatments and cures would not happen without investment in medical research. Medical research extends the length of life and improves the quality of life.

Currently heart disease is the biggest killer in the country, killing 43,000 Australians and affecting a further 3.7 million each year.

Your kind donation today, can help to change these devastating figures and give hope to the millions of people currently suffering and their loved ones.

Please give generously today as your gift truly will make a difference.
Heart disease can happen to anyone and that is why we won’t stop researching.