



Don Kirberger, retired engineer, is glad to get back to his consulting work after open-heart surgery.

# Quadruple bypass surgery saves man's life

When Don Kirberger decided to go to St. Luke's Emergency Department for his shortness of breath, he thought it was just lingering symptoms left over from his recent bout with pneumonia.

"I noticed I was getting tired when walking," he recalled. "So my wife, Karen, insisted I go to the Emergency Department." As it turns out, Don had the same doctor, Ryan Dowden, MD, who previously treated him for pneumonia. But this time, after noticing his elevated cardiac enzymes and a resting pulse rate of 112, the emergency room doctor became suspicious.

Dr. Dowden called in Richard Kettelkamp, DO, a cardiologist with Cardiologists, L.C., who suspected Don had a blockage in his heart. Dr. Kettelkamp recommended a cardiac catheterization procedure to determine the problem.

What Dr. Kettlekamp found during catheterization was not one, but ten cardiac blockages. "He called my wife into the room to show her, and advised us against putting in that many stents," said Don.

**Bypass surgery**  
Don and Karen's decision to come in was a good thing. Dr. Kettelkamp consulted with James Levett, MD,

cardiothoracic surgeon with Physicians' Clinic of Iowa, P.C., who recommended bypass surgery using veins and arteries from other parts of his body. A week later, Don had open-heart surgery to perform five bypasses for ten blockages in his heart.

"I had heard the doctors at St. Luke's were number one in heart surgery," said Don. "So I had every confidence in the procedure. I've always gone to St. Luke's and I just feel that even though it's in a good-sized city, it has a small town feeling where people take care of you."

Karen agrees. "I was comforted by the fact that I was kept informed every

hour," she said. "He was taken in for surgery at 7:40 a.m.; started at 8:30; at 9:30 the nurse told me he was on the bypass machine and at 10:30, he was done. So I wasn't just sitting there. The staff kept me informed and I appreciated that."

"Don had a great operation," said Dr. Levett. "It helped that not only Don, but his heart, are in good shape and worked well. Other than his blockages Don's heart is a good, strong heart."

**Recovery**  
After surgery, Don was in the intensive care unit (ICU) for 24 hours and then on to the cardiac care unit, where he began rehabilitation. And a week after some initial rehabilitation at St. Luke's, he was able to go home. "It's amazing to me that you can have open-heart surgery and be home in a week," said Karen. "Everyday I could see him getting better. Even the day after surgery, I walked in to the ICU and they were walking him. That was such a surprise to me."

After returning home, Don continued with his rehabilitation routine that included exercising, avoiding physical stress and watching his diet; as well as attending cardiac rehab classes at St. Luke's.

"This procedure will make Don feel much better, we were able to get the blood supply fixed and that will help

him a lot," said Dr. Levett. "Each day he will be able to do a little bit more."  
"I definitely want to get back to normal," said Don with an optimistic attitude. "But I found I have to be patient," added the retired engineer.

Don is looking forward to mowing his lawn, chopping wood and improving his golf game.

"Looking back," Karen said with a catch in her voice, "if we had not gone to the hospital on that Friday afternoon, he probably would have had a major heart attack and would not be here. So what I'd like people to know is that if you're having sensations in your chest, don't ignore it. Go to the emergency room, that's what it's there for. It may be a false alarm. Maybe it's only indigestion and you're embarrassed – be embarrassed."

St. Luke's is an Accredited Chest Pain Center with the Society of Chest Pain Centers (SCPC). This accreditation recognizes St. Luke's higher level of expertise in dealing with patients who arrive at the hospital with symptoms of a heart attack.

**To watch Don's video story and his open-heart surgery log on to [stlukescr.org](http://stlukescr.org) and look for the "Inside St. Luke's OR" banner.**

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James Levett, MD  
cardiothoracic surgeon, Physicians' Clinic of Iowa, P.C.

## Signs & symptoms of heart attack

Sudden, severe chest pain is always an emergency. Don't wait. Call 911.

The first hour of a heart attack is the most critical. Treating warning signs right away can mean the difference between life and death.

- Heart attack symptoms:
- Uncomfortable fullness, pressure, squeezing or pain in the chest lasting two or more minutes. Pain may range from mild to unbearable.
  - Pain that spreads to the shoulders, neck, jaw, arms or back.
  - Lightheadedness, sweating, nausea or shortness of breath.

If you experience one or more warning signs of a heart attack call 911 or have someone drive you to St. Luke's Emergency Room right away.

