

“I turned my heart disease from obstacle to advantage!”

Javie Madrigal is living his best life despite his ongoing battle with coronary artery disease. —BY KAREN KLEIMANN

Whether hiking with his family or working out, Javie Madrigal, 52, is beating the odds after surviving several heart attacks. The Seattle-area family man is now paying it forward with the help of his wife, Jessica, in the hope it will inspire others to forge a heart-friendly lifestyle.

“My greatest triumph was finally being able to take control of my health,” he says.

But for most of his adult life, Javie worried his heart problems would keep him from being there for his family.

“I thought I was too young for heart problems!”

Starting in his late 20s, Javie couldn’t shake ongoing symptoms like shortness of breath, chest pain and occasional fainting. He was evaluated, but because he was so young, doctors chalked it up to anxiety.

Still, the symptoms lingered. A few years later, Javie was working out when chest pain prevented him from completing his workout.

That’s when the then 35-year-old knew something was very wrong. He was rushed to the hospital where he was diagnosed with coronary artery disease. He was put on medication and immediately changed his diet to

reduce his intake of sugar, salt and fried and processed foods.

“My heart disease was getting worse”

Despite various medication adjustments over the next 15 years, Javie kept ending up in the hospital with worsening coronary artery disease. At age 38, he needed two stents due to artery blockages and subsequently doubled down on improving his lifestyle.

“I was trying everything I could to get it under control,” he says, but he still needed heart surgery at age 40 and several more stents by age 50. In 2018, after getting his sixth stent, Javie made the switch to plant-based nutrition, and it seemed to work: In September 2019, his numbers were so good that Javie was taken off some of his medication, including blood thinners. But just weeks later, he suddenly suffered a blood clot and a major heart attack. What’s worse, during his hospital stay, he experienced two more heart attacks from blood clots and needed two more stents.

“Blood thinners are my lifeline now”

Given the progressive nature of his heart disease, Javie was told he’d need

to be on blood thinners for the rest of his life to protect against stroke and additional heart attacks caused by blood clots. Recognizing the importance of maximizing his heart health, Javie carefully follows his daily treatment regimen, which also includes medications to regulate his blood pressure and cholesterol levels.

The combination of medication, a plant-based diet and exercise has helped keep Javie’s numbers in a healthy range and stalled the progression of his heart disease.

“I’ve found my purpose!”

Since his battle with heart disease began, Javie and Jessica have focused on improving their whole family’s heart health. And they also wanted to help advocate for and empower others facing similar experiences. In 2018, they founded Underdog Ninja Foundation, a nonprofit focused on helping others navigate heart disease through education, mentoring and coaching in nutrition, fitness, stress management and personal growth.

“Forming this nonprofit has fulfilled what we believe is our calling and purpose. I want those battling heart disease to know there is hope and that they are not alone in this fight,” says Javie. “Underdogs can beat the odds.” 🐾



“I’m proof you can live a healthy life!”

Javie is sharing the message that people can thrive despite coronary artery disease. Here, he shares the strategies that keep him on the go and energetic.

Make eating healthy fun.

Javie, Jessica and their two girls challenge each other to find and create recipes based on flavorful combinations, like mac and cheese made from chickpea pasta and cashew-based cheese. “Our focus is on a heart-healthy diet that derives most nutrients from vegetables, fruits, whole grains, seeds, nuts, beans and legumes while eliminating added sugar, salt and processed foods. We try to make it a bonding, motivating experience,” says Javie.

Cut down on stress.

Javie practices relaxation methods like breathing techniques and meditation, but also, “When I think I’ll be facing a stressful situation, I try to plan my response and the attitude I will have.”

Find your reason to keep fighting.

“My family has been my number one support system and part of the reason I have been able to successfully work out my treatment plan,” says Javie, adding he also

has four adult children who are proactive with their heart health. Faith also plays a role. “It defines and shapes who I am—my purpose, my calling and my actions in giving back to the heart disease community as a whole.”

Gather a team for your whole health.

Javie makes sure to address his coronary artery disease from all sides. “Be in regular contact with all your healthcare professionals. This is good for medication management, accountability and symptom assessment.”

Stay active.

Javie earned a certification in personal training and corrective exercise several years ago and uses that as a guide for whole body wellness. “I have a philosophy that I call ‘From The Ground Up.’ This method is based on balance and stability training, core training, flexibility, agility, and then followed up with bodyweight and strength training. I focus on longevity and heart health as opposed to strictly weight loss or bodybuilding.”