Brenda Foley, 54, could easily be a model for good health. She is slender, works out regularly, eats healthy and has annual wellness visits with her primary care provider. So it was a shock when Brenda discovered that she had a major blockage in one of the main arteries to her heart.

“I am not a textbook coronary artery disease person,” she shared. “I didn’t present any of those typical heart disease or blockage symptoms prior to my diagnosis. I am not overweight. I am not diabetic. I don’t have hypertension. I do not have high cholesterol.” Brenda also doesn’t have a family history of heart disease.

The artery blockage was discovered after Brenda came to Cheyenne Regional Medical Center’s emergency department, the day after she’d suffered tunnel vision and a headache, one of many ocular migraines she’d had in recent weeks.

Brenda had likely experienced a transient ischemic attack (TIA) the day before. A TIA, which is often called a “mini-stroke,” is caused by a temporary blockage of blood flow to the brain. While a TIA doesn’t cause permanent damage, it can be a warning sign that a full-blown stroke is ahead.

At the emergency department, Brenda’s neurological tests came back “clear.” But CRMC neurologist Dr. Tyler Leigh knew they needed to investigate further.

In addition to the ocular migraines, Brenda had been experiencing a racing heart. “I’d be driving down the road, and it felt like my heart was beating out of my chest,” she said.

Dr. Leigh wanted to find out what could have caused the suspected TIA and why Brenda was having other symptoms.

“I cast a broad net … in terms of trying to figure out whether there was something associated with the symptoms Brenda had been experiencing,” Dr. Leigh explained. “We didn’t want to miss something ominous…that could cause a permanent deficit.”

Dr. Leigh asked Brenda to wear a cardiac monitoring device for a couple of days, to track her heartbeats. The device showed there was a problem. After Dr. Leigh consulted with Brenda’s primary care provider, she was scheduled to see a cardiologist. Further tests indicated Brenda had a major—and possibly life-threatening—blockage in one of her coronary arteries.

Brenda’s artery was opened successfully by interventional cardiologist Dr. Ahmad Alqaqa’a and the cardiac catheterization team at Cheyenne Regional Medical Center.

Brenda has since recovered and is back to doing the things she loves. This includes her long-time work as a local radio personality, involvement in community events, traveling with her husband and spending time with family and friends.

“We caught it, and I’m firing on all cylinders now,” she said.

Just a few months after her procedure, Brenda agreed to share her experience at a women’s heart health event at Cheyenne Regional Medical Center.

Brenda encouraged the more than 100 women present to take care of themselves. Equally important, she said, was for them to be in tune with their bodies and insist on getting help if they felt that something was wrong.

“Sometimes what’s really wrong can be masked by other things going on in your life,” she said. “But no one knows your body better than you do! You have to know how important advocating for yourself is!”

You can hear about Brenda’s unexpected heart health journey in a video she recorded and allowed us to share on our website at cheyenneregional.org.

“No one knows your body better than you do!”

Brenda Foley

Cheyenne Regional Medical Center


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