

# Flyers Alum Skates his way into Recovery from Stroke



**Join Brian Propp at the Philadelphia Heart Walk on November 5**



Brian Propp



## If you're a Philadelphia Flyers fan, you know Brian Propp.

A Delaware Valley resident, Brian has been enjoying his over 20 years of retirement as a family man, golf enthusiast and, ostensibly, skating and playing hockey regularly. This is, of course, after a high profile 15-season as a left winger.

For professional athletes, a regular physical is required. But even after he retired, Brian made his health a priority. Brian said, "I believed a stroke was only something that could happen to someone else, but I am a testament to the fact that a stroke can happen to anyone at any time."

He continues, "Working out and staying on top of my health still remains a part of my daily regimen. Growing up in Saskatchewan, as soon as you learn to walk, you learn to skate. And because I've been skating for as long as I can remember, I didn't stop after retirement. I stayed active on and off the ice, even playing in regular alumni games."

Sometime in 2000, during a routine physical, Brian's doctor diagnosed him with Atrial Fibrillation – an irregular heartbeat. His feeling of being breathless was a gradual progression, but he ignored this symptom, including his fatigue. According to the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association, AFib can be symptomless or you can feel an irregular heartbeat, fluttering, or thumping

in your chest. It can also make you feel breathless, light-headed and fatigued. He remembers, "After a few years, I started getting noticeably tired... where I felt like I had to lay down a lot. As a result of my AFib, I was put on blood thinners but sometime in '09 I had an ablation to fix it. After that, I felt like I was back to normal. I felt good... maybe too good because I stopped following up with my doctor and stopped paying attention to my AFib. I was in the clear. Or so I thought."

An estimated 2.7 million Americans are living with AFib. That number is estimated to grow as high as 12 million by the year 2050. It's the most common "serious" heart rhythm problem in people over 65 and can increase your risk of stroke five times.

On September 3, 2015, he was vacationing with his wife, Kris, and his two children in Annapolis, MD, when a severe headache came on sometime during the evening. He tried to sleep through it, but it kept him awake. Next on the remedy list? Aspirin. But as he attempted to get up out of bed to get the aspirin, he realized his right arm and leg were numb. He fell face first into the side of the bed and knocked out a couple teeth. The noise from the fall woke everyone up.

Paramedics were called and he was told he was having a stroke. Brian, 57, was immobile. He also couldn't speak so he couldn't react. "What I can tell you now is that I was a healthy, former pro-athlete who couldn't stand up. I had been hit countless times during my years with the Flyers and the NHL and never lost any teeth, never had any issues that sidelined me and so I didn't know how to deal with this. I got through it with the help of my family and a great rehab hospital."

It's been a little over a year since his stroke and Brian is still weak on his right side and has aphasia. He is back to skating twice a week with his friends, but has had to learn to do several things left-handed, including signing his name. Speaking publicly has also been a form of therapy. But he is optimistic about his recovery and still goes to rehab regularly.

He says, "It is important for me to mention that there is a need for men and women to be aware of their risk for stroke. I think we need to talk about stroke and stroke prevention more openly."

**Come learn about your risk of stroke and heart disease at the Philadelphia Heart Walk on Saturday, November 5 at Citizens Bank Park.**

**Visit [heart.org/phillywalk](http://heart.org/phillywalk) for more info.**

