

Sarah Collins

ACUTE RESPIRATORY DISTRESS SYNDROME



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Imagine waking up in a hospital room, unable to move or speak. Then you find out two months have passed.

My journey on the roller coaster of acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS) began when I was intubated after contracting pneumonia due to swine flu (H1N1). I had no idea that when I went to the ER—with what I thought was just a bad cough—that I would be starting the fight of my life.

Forty-eight hours after I was admitted to the hospital, I was transferred to the ICU of a larger local hospital, intubated and placed into a medically-induced coma. My husband was told that I likely wouldn't make it through the day. After exhausting all local options, I was survival-flown to the University of Michigan, where they had more options to treat my condition. My husband and his parents and brother moved to Michigan, and our five children were sent to live with other family members, while doctors worked diligently to save me.

ARDS is vicious and fast moving. Setback after setback occurred, and my loved ones were glued to the monitors and hardly slept through the night in fear of a phone call with bad news. Kidney failure, multiple cardiac arrests, lack of oxygen to the brain, and secondary infections took a toll on me. It was one step forward, two steps back for a long time. But my family never gave up hope.

After two months in a coma and four months on a ventilator, I began inpatient rehab. I had to learn to walk, feed and dress myself, and regain the strength that I lost in my battle to stay alive. I finally went home, and after a year that included outpatient cardiopulmonary rehab, I weaned off supplemental oxygen.

In spite of lingering cognitive issues, decreased lung function, and recurring pneumonia, I am so lucky to be alive. I am a survivor. I am a true miracle and feel most blessed when I am able to provide support for patients going through similar situations. My take away from all this is: "Slow and steady wins the race."

Never give up!

Sarah Collins was a patient speaker at the ATS 2017 International Conference in Washington, D.C.

ACUTE RESPIRATORY DISTRESS SYNDROME



Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome (ARDS) is a life threatening problem in which the lungs are severely injured. Inflammation (swelling) occurs throughout the lungs. In the lung tissue tiny blood vessels leak fluid and the air sacs (alveoli) collapse or fill with fluid. This fluid buildup keeps the lungs from working well.

People with ARDS generally have one or more of the following symptoms:

- shortness of breath
- cough (often with white or pink frothy sputum)
- fatigue
- fever
- abdominal pain (in pancreatitis)

Learn more: ATS Patient Education Series. "What is Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome?" New York, NY. www.thoracic.org/patients/patient-resources/resources/acute-respiratory-distress-syndrome.pdf