

# Health & Fitness Journal of Canada

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## THE PATIENT'S PERSPECTIVE A Transplant Patient's Journey Carrie Jung

### COMMENTARY

In June 2002, less than one week after I received my new heart, I went into severe rejection. Unable to sleep and unable to keep still because of pain and insomnia, I roamed through the hallways of Ward 5A, the home of the Heart Transplant Clinic at St. Paul's Hospital in Vancouver, BC.

My nighttime prowling led me to the bulletin board at the far end of one hallway, where a colourful poster advertised the 14<sup>th</sup> World Transplant Games, to take place the following summer in Nancy, France.

I read the poster and was instantly captivated. Without really knowing what the World Transplant Games were, and not knowing what kind of commitment would be needed to participate in the events, I vowed to myself that one day, I would overcome years of ill health and inactivity and go to the Transplant Games.

That poster became my inspiration and my motivation. Three years after my heart transplant, I went to my first World Transplant Games in London, Ontario, and I discovered that of the four events I entered, my favourite was the 100m sprint. I also realized how much dedication and commitment pursuing this sport would require, so I decided to seek professional expertise to help me with my training and performance goals.

The following year, in January 2006, I began to train with a CSEP-Certified Exercise Physiologist, Tim LeBas. Tim has been developing his expertise working as a clinical exercise physiologist and high performance trainer with people who are organ transplant recipients.

Working under the supervision of Dr. Darren Warburton at the Cardiovascular Physiology and Rehabilitation Laboratory at UBC, Tim designed a training program specific to my goals. The program included evaluating the effects of post-transplant medications on the body and on athletic performance. It also involved a full high performance assessment including measurements of strength, flexibility, maximal aerobic power ( $VO_{2max}$ ) and anaerobic power (Wingate).

One of the side-effects of my heart transplant is high blood pressure, and this caused dizziness whenever I stood up suddenly. Because of this, at the start of my training, I was not able to tolerate the use of starting blocks. Tim designed several exercises that I could practice in the gym to help me overcome this intolerance, and in a few short weeks, I was able to spring out of my starting blocks without feeling any dizziness.

Based on the results of the physiological assessments, Tim designed various workouts for me. We started with building core strength and then moved on to overall strength. He also gave me weekly weight training programs, each increasing in intensity and weight. I had to learn how to do exercises that increased my strength, endurance, and power.

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## The High Performance Transplant Patient

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Similar to other high performance athletes, we trained both indoors and outdoors, in the gym, on the stairs, on the field, and on the track. With spikes, without spikes, with blocks, without blocks, pushing for greater speed and better performance. Six months later, I competed in the Canadian Transplant Games in Edmonton, Alberta, and returned with three gold medals: 100m, 200m, and the 4 X 100m team relay. This result was the culmination of our hard work and the beginning of the realization of a vow I had made several years before.

Since those Games in Edmonton, I have competed in the World Games in Bangkok and another Canadian Games in Windsor. For me, the real measure of my training came last summer, when I competed, for the first time, against non-transplant recipients. I went to Regina to race in the Canadian Masters Track & Field Championships, and returned with a silver medal in the 100m race.

In the past few years, training and performance have been the key motivators in my life. Sprinting has been my passion. Because of the expertise of a CSEP Exercise Physiologist, the vow I made one week after my heart transplant (to become stronger, healthier and faster) has been realized.

I have not looked back.

