

A portrait of Gerrard Gaudiello, a man with short dark hair and a slight smile, wearing a blue and white checkered button-down shirt. The background is a dark, solid color.

Never lose hope

Gerrard Gaudiello's
epilepsy story

There are important milestones in everyone's life and we were thrilled to celebrate four years' seizure free with Gerrard Gaudiello during our Purple Day 2017 awareness month. Gerrard is another surgery success story. Gerrard believes that "if he can get through epilepsy surgery he can get through anything".

It wasn't always smooth sailing for Gerrard and he shared what it was like for him living with epilepsy prior to the operation.

"Nothing was helping me. I was drowsy all of the time and my weight was constantly fluctuating with the medications. It got to the point where Dad was checking on me every time I had a shower to make sure I was alright."

"People I didn't know thought I was drunk when I was having a seizure. I was just completely unaware. I was having instances when I was coming out of tonic clonics and I was violent. There is just so much stigma and a lack of awareness associated with epilepsy. I can remember that it made me feel terrible and so insecure. I hope that through sharing our stories of living with epilepsy this can change."

Gerrard first had signs of epilepsy with déjà vu feelings at the age of 16, but he wasn't officially diagnosed until the age of 17. Despite the difficulties, he completed high school and a Diploma of Tourism as well. His graduation photo is an ongoing reminder of what life was like pre-surgery as it captured him having an absence seizure.

When his neurologist proposed epilepsy surgery, he felt he had no choice. A meeting with Epilepsy Queensland Patron Wally Lewis helped him to feel reassured that he was doing the right thing.

"Wally said to me that he always urges anyone who is a candidate for surgery to do it while they are still young. He felt like he wasted so many years because of fear and denial."

"He gave me advice on what to expect after the surgery. He told me to expect to wake up with a massive headache and don't be afraid to ask for pain medication. You're going to need it. He was right. I woke up with the worst pain and a great scar with 20 staples in my head. A couple of days later I had a black eye."

"While the pain eventually subsided, it took me about six months to fully recover. I didn't drink and was so relieved to get through the first 12 months' seizure free. Now I'm four years' seizure free and I know every bit of pain was worth it."

Gerrard also shared the need for support post-surgery. "It's not just the physical recovery but depression is also normal for people after epilepsy surgery. Wally Lewis spoke to me about it when we met up before my surgery and it really helped because I was aware of it and was able to deal with it when it came up. Anyone with signs of depression should seek help and be open about it."



Like Wally, Gerrard's aim in life is now to help others, whether they have epilepsy or other conditions. The time spent in hospital recovering from his surgery gave him a huge appreciation for the nurses that care for everyone. It also gave him time to reflect on his future life direction and he came out determined to pursue a career in nursing.

Two years after his surgery Gerrard commenced his Nursing Degree and he is now getting close to completing it. Gerrard said: "It was the best choice I have made other than surgery. The job they did was just marvelous and I want to help people in tough situations."

Gerrard also wants to help others considering surgery. "Sometimes what you need is someone to talk to who is in the same situation to put your mind at ease. When I spoke to Wally Lewis it helped me with the fear. I want to be able to do that for others. I would urge anyone considering surgery who is scared to get in touch with Epilepsy Queensland and they can connect you with someone who has been through it."

Gerrard's message for anyone struggling with their epilepsy is: "Anything is possible. Don't let it be a setback, let it be a challenge. Even if you can't control your seizures seek help from Epilepsy Queensland or your medical team to manage them. Medications improve all the time and with research that will continue and a cure will come. So never lose hope."

If you are considering surgery, would like to speak to someone about managing epilepsy or need support contact Epilepsy Queensland on **07 3435 5000** or **1300 852 853** (outside Brisbane) or email services@epilepsyqueensland.com.au.