



# WOUTER'S INSPIRING STORY

WINTER 2023



**Wouter knows he didn't lead the healthiest lifestyle before his triple bypass in 2015. "I was a smoker, and overweight for a long time. As a South African, we tend not to eat healthily. We like our fatty meats, and rich, fried foods, and I did a lot of damage to myself."**

After his heart operation, he made changes - like quitting smoking and improving his diet, but one day in June 2022 his son noticed something was wrong. "My son asked; 'Dad, are you OK? Your face is dropping to one side - it looks like you are having a stroke.' Then I started walking and talking strangely, and I lost feeling on my left side."

They went straight to hospital, where Wouter was given blood thinners and monitored. He was then discharged, but a few weeks later he had a much more serious stroke, which led to months of recovery and hard recuperation work. "The first

few months were pretty horrible. I could barely use my left side, and I didn't like talking to people - I could barely understand myself when I spoke."

Like many stroke survivors, the road to recovery held some tough personal challenges for Wouter. "You can start to feel down because there are a million questions that go through your mind like, 'Will this happen again?' and 'Am I going to be dependent on others for the rest of my life?' Being unable to work, and the thought of being a burden to my loved ones scared the living daylights out of me."

But Wouter was persistent, and connected with experts that could help, including Karen, a Stroke Foundation Community Stroke Advisor in his area, who was there to support him and his family as they navigated their way through their new lives after stroke.

*"Her work gets into your spirit, it's just impossible to feel negative after spending time with her, and that's very important after having a stroke."* -Wouter

"Karen was such an inspiration," Wouter told us. "She helped me through everything that was happening and motivated me. The way she would celebrate my progress was just what I needed; to see the good, have a positive mindset, and keep going."

As a man who's used to working hard, Wouter found his new lifestyle difficult. "Even though I've always had support and patience from my family, I felt guilty about not bringing anything to the table. I applied for jobs and was honest about what had happened. But nobody replied, so we started looking into going into

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business for ourselves." Wouter now owns a franchise business assembling flatpack kitsets.

He's taken his healthy eating to another level, and only has unhealthy foods on the rare occasion. At Christmas, Wouter's family bought him a fitbit scale and watch, and since then he's lost an incredible 16kg! "I'm working hard to be as healthy as possible because I want to be there for my family," Wouter said. "I'm determined to make my life a success. I'm not going to let my stroke hold me back, and I'm happy for every day I have."

The doctors can't say for sure if Wouter could have another stroke, but like him, minimising your risk comes down to understanding your own health and making choices to reduce your risk. "I shouldn't

have ignored my health," Wouter explained. "Now I'd say: listen to the good advice and don't give up. The unhealthy habits are great in the moment, but they really are damaging."

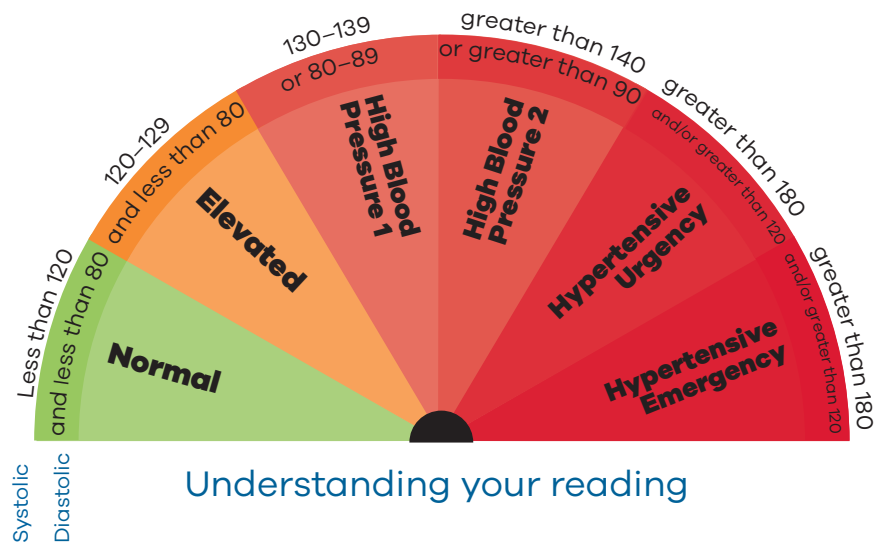
Karen and Wouter continue to stay in touch to check in on his progress. "All I can say is Karen is one amazing person, and the Stroke Foundation and everyone who supports can be glad knowing that they have someone like her on the team."

*Wouter has made some amazing changes to prevent future strokes. We work to encourage more people to understand and be proactive about their health before a major health event happens. The first step is to know your blood pressure and keep it low, **keep reading to find out more...***

## UNDERSTANDING YOUR HEALTH AND HOW TO REDUCE YOUR STROKE RISK

**High blood pressure is a leading risk factor for stroke. It puts strain on blood vessels, including the ones in your brain. This strain can damage blood vessels, causing them to become harder and narrower. The vessels are then more likely to block or burst, causing a stroke.**

The causes of high blood pressure are complex, but there are a number of lifestyle factors that can lead to high blood pressure, such as: smoking, stress, alcohol consumption, lack of physical activity, a diet high in salt and processed foods, and also your family history.



### Here's what you can do to look after yourself and reduce your stroke risk:



Get your blood pressure checked at least once a year.



Eat mostly whole foods – limit salt and processed foods.



Aim for at least two alcohol-free days a week.



Be smokefree. If you're ready to quit, contact Quitline 0800 778 778 or quit.org.nz.



Limit your caffeine intake.



Incorporate more activity into each day.



Make sure you're getting enough sleep and manage stress levels.



Take any blood pressure medication prescribed by your doctor.





# THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING OUR COMMUNITIES!

We gave over 760 free blood pressure checks at this year's Fieldays! It was great to be there to offer this service to so many people living in our rural communities, and meet some amazing people whose lives have been changed by what seems like such a simple thing – a free blood pressure check. Here are a few of their stories.

## Stories from the BP Van

A Fieldays staff member brought his father for a check and decided to get tested as well. He had a high reading and no idea that he could have high blood pressure but said he had been getting headaches and sore eyes. The team advised him to see his GP as soon as possible for follow-up and treatment.

A teenager who'd won the Health Hub Quiz about F.A.S.T. encouraged his father to get a BP check and he came out with two high readings in a row. In this case, it was great for the father to have the support of his son and we know his son will be a champion for his dad's health moving forward.

A woman stopped by to say thanks for saving her father's life. At Fieldays 2022 he had visited and found he had very high blood pressure. He followed up with his doctor, and is now on medication. Now he is about to have a triple bypass to further reduce his stroke and heart attack risk, something that would not have been picked up without his visit to the BP van!

A woman who is very careful about managing her health had a reading indicating hypertensive crisis. She was shocked as she had never had a high reading and was feeling fine. We escorted her to the team at Hato Hone St John who were able to assess her and provide emergency antihypertensive medication until she could follow up with her GP.



## WHAT OUR VANS HAVE BEEN ABLE TO DO OVER THE LAST YEAR:

**11,469** PEOPLE RECEIVED  
FREE BLOOD PRESSURE AND  
ATRIAL FIBRILLATION CHECKS

**63%** HAD A HIGH READING  
**269** WERE IN  
HYPERTENSIVE CRISIS





# Fighting stroke together – our amalgamation with Stroke Central

This year, the Stroke Foundation of New Zealand has amalgamated with Stroke Tairāwhiti and Stroke Central NZ! We are very pleased to say that as of 1 July 2023, we are one unified national organisation that covers the whole of Aotearoa. By joining together, we will deliver a nationally consistent, high-quality community stroke service for all Kiwis - wherever they live. Stroke Central NZ has become the Central Region of the Stroke Foundation, adding to our three existing regions – Northern, Midland (which now includes Stroke Tairāwhiti) and Southern.

Robin Boldarin, President of Stroke Central, says: "This change will come with many benefits for our



Photo: Dean Kozanic

clients, while allowing us to maintain our local workforce, services and community groups. We will continue to provide

the same high standard of service, alongside new health promotion and stroke prevention services."

## Have you sought help for bladder problems?

Researchers at the University of Otago are looking for volunteers to participate in a study of Incontinence in Neurological Conditions. They are looking to speak with individuals who have experienced stroke, Parkinson's

disease or multiple sclerosis who currently or previously have received care for bladder problems. If you are interested in participating in this study, please send a message to: [pelvichealthphysio@otago.ac.nz](mailto:pelvichealthphysio@otago.ac.nz)



– all participants will receive a \$40 voucher.



**Fight stroke your way!**

Fight stroke your way – get your beanie today!



[fightstroke.org.nz](http://fightstroke.org.nz)

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