



Faces of CHD | Kaleb's Story



Meet Kaleb & his mom, Kerri

Age 2½

CHD Diagnosis: Coarctation of Aorta

Today, at almost three years old, you'd never know about the scary start to life Kaleb experienced at just a month old.

Like too many others, Kaleb's Congenital Heart Defect (CHD) was undiagnosed before birth. He was born at term, at a healthy weight, and came into the world the colour of pink that makes doctors happy. At his one month check up, the doctor heard a small murmur and sent Kaleb for an echocardiogram to be safe. Because he was showing no other signs of having a CHD, there was no rush to get him looked at, and Kerri and her husband went to the appointment with the feeling that there was nothing to worry about.

36 hours later, at just 2 months old, Kaleb would have open-heart surgery to repair one of the worst cases of coarctation of the aorta that his surgeon had ever seen.

While Kaleb's surgery was successful, and today he is on no medications and has no physical restrictions, like many other parents of children with CHDs, the impact of the experience on Kaleb's family has been one with lasting effects.

The two-week stay in ICU that followed Kaleb's surgery was an emotional time for the family – one that took them more time than expected to fully understand and accept.

"I would encourage first-time heart parents, or really anyone dealing with a heart problem for the first time, to reach out and ask for help. You can't look after your child unless you're at your best." Kerri said, when asked what advice she'd give to other heart parents.

The social workers and nurses had offered Kerri and her family support resources during their hospital stay. "I couldn't do it at the time. I couldn't figure out how to explain what had happened, or how to say that I needed help. But once I did, it was the best thing I could have done."

The other piece of advice that Kerri offers to parents is simple - trust your gut. "Even though Kaleb went undiagnosed because of his lack of symptoms, I felt in my heart something was wrong. A lot of issues he had after surgery could have been avoided had he received surgery at one month instead of two. From now on I always trust my gut and never feel bad for it!"