

For Normal, Illinois resident Steve McAllister, retired life was going well. This past spring the former banker was spending his days with his wife of 44 years and was expecting his first grandchild.

McAllister was painting houses in his spare time and was generally feeling great. But, because of family history of heart disease and some recent fatigue, he decided to take a heart risk assessment. A couple days after McAllister's screening, he got an urgent call. He needed to be seen immediately.

"I had a problem and I didn't know it, and had no symptoms at all except for some fatigue. They said, 'You really have a bad heart – arteries around your heart, and we need to operate on you ASAP, or you're not going to be here.'"

McAllister had significant blockages in all three main arteries of his heart. Just days later, he received open heart bypass surgery to clear the blockages.

McAllister's OSF HealthCare cardiologist, Dr. Yogesh Agarwal, says McAllister is lucky he took the screening when he did.

After his open heart surgery in May, McAllister is on the road to recovery. He is currently undergoing cardiovascular rehabilitation, and is making big lifestyle changes to make sure he gives his heart a fighting chance to beat on for a long time coming.

He has also changed his way of thinking when it comes to health care. McAllister says knowing your risk factors is the best weapon of prevention, and Dr. Agarwal agrees.

"I caution people, everybody I talk to, you really don't know what's underneath, and a big part of your health issues are inside and you don't know what's going on. You think you do, but you don't," said McAllister.

"I think that is worth it," added Dr. Agarwal. "Even if they don't have serious disease that required intervention now, but at least they can start thinking more about prevention to have it down the road."

McAllister says he is currently working toward a goal of getting back on the golf course, with his care team by his side.

"The surgeon said, 'Do you have a goal in mind?' and I said yeah. I want to swing a golf club. I want to take a golf trip in October, and he said, 'We'll get you there.'"

He says there is one lesson he will never forget. Life is precious, and he plans on being there for as much of it as possible.

"I am getting better every day. That I can tell," reflected McAllister. "Time is a commodity. I've got that lesson drilled into me. The clock's ticking, it always is."

If you want to know more about your heart health, OSF HealthCare Cardiovascular Institute offers a free online heart risk assessment. Log on to osfhealthcare.org/heart, or click [here](#) to take the assessment.