

Breakthrough dissolving heart device has patient feeling 100 per cent

By [Juliet Rowan](#)

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John Lamb's chest pain was getting the better of him and he was "running out of steam" before he volunteered to have the world's first dissolvable heart stent put in an artery.

Now, almost a year later, the Tauranga vehicle inspector is feeling at the top of his game, glad that he chose to be one of several patients to test the device at Auckland City Hospital.

"I'm good as gold, 100 per cent, back to what I would expect for my age," the 65-year-old said.

Mr Lamb, who suffered from angina, was offered the stent – which works in the same way as conventional metal stents by expanding arteries that have narrowed and restrict blood flow – when he went for an angiogram.

"I happened to be in the right place at the right time," he said. "[The doctors] said, 'You would be a prime candidate for this new one. Are you interested?' And I said yes."

The stent is made of a polymer that dissolves in two or three years into lactic acid, which metabolises into carbon dioxide and water and is absorbed by the body.

Mr Lamb considers the stent much better than the conventional metal stents, or newer drug-coated ones, which are designed to reduce the problem of tissue regrowing and the artery re-narrowing.

"To me it [the dissolvable stent] makes a lot more sense. The drug-coated ones, they're still a metal stent. At the end of the day, you've still got a hunk of metal in your system that doesn't go away."

He was willing to be a guinea pig because he was "a great believer in research" and felt the risks were low.

"The way I saw it, the worst that could probably happen is I've got to turn round and have surgery later."

The dissolvable stent, developed in the United States, is being tried out on 30 patients here and in Europe.

The head of the New Zealand trial, cardiologist Dr John Ormiston, said results so far were very pleasing.

"None of our patients has put a foot wrong, or should I say, the stent hasn't put a foot wrong."

Six-month results from the patients would be presented at an American College of Cardiology meeting this month, which Dr Ormiston said would be "a big milestone" for the trial.

Patients would continue to be monitored for the next five years, but thousands would need to test the stent before it could be used clinically, and that would take years.

Dr Ormiston said the dissolvable device had the potential to end the need for metal stents.

Specialists have urged the Government to pay for drug-coated metal stents, but concern has been voiced internationally about them because of a slightly increased rate of potentially fatal blood clots.

The clots may lead to heart attacks or worse.



John Lamb was willing to be a guinea pig because he is 'a great believer in research'.
Photo / Alan Gibson

The Experiment

* Stents are objects used to keep heart arteries open so blood can flow.

* Traditionally they are made of metal. Some are coated with drugs to stop body tissue growth blocking the artery.

* Dissolvable stents, which melt away after two or three years, are now being tested on patients at Auckland City Hospital.

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