

Just hours later, he's sitting up and reading

BY SHAUN SMILLIE

Wally might have scored himself a lifetime supply of Nando's, but fast-food orders will be a definite no-no as he and his heart begin their second lease on life.

Yesterday, Waldemar Katzke - or simply Wally, as he has become known to millions of South Africans - was recovering well after his historic operation.

He was the first SA patient to have his open-heart surgery filmed live.

Wally was so well, in fact, that doctors reported he was sitting up in his bed in the ICU of Netcare Milpark Hospital, Joburg, 12 hours after open-heart surgery - reading a book.

On Saturday night, an estimated 2-million TV viewers finally got to meet Wally's heart, in an unusual reality show.

They watched for two hours as Gauteng cardiothoracic surgeon Martin Sussman took a length of blood vessel harvested from Wally's chest to bypass a diseased artery in his heart.

As Sussman worked, SMSs scrolled across the screen, wishing Wally a speedy recovery.

Wally agreed to have the operation done live on SABC3 as part of an initiative by the Heart and Stroke Foundation of South Africa (HSFSA) to highlight the dangers of heart disease.

However, the number of chicken fast-food adverts flighted during the programme - offering Wally free fast-food for the rest of his life - left a few of the foundation members perturbed.

Artery-clogging saturated fat, a main ingredient of fast-food, is the chief enemy of

cardiologists the world over.

Now with surgery over, phase two begins as a team of experts help Wally make a full recovery and give him the foundations for a healthy lifestyle.

"A biokineticist will be helping him with an exercise routine and a psychologist will deal with his emotional side as, often after surgery, some patients experience depression," said Michelle Kearney, communications director of the HSFSA.

"A nutritionist then will look after his diet."

The foundation's Shan Biesman-Simons said Wally's exercise routine would be gradual.

"It will start fairly soon, as long as no pressure is placed

The main challenge now will be his diet

on his chest for the moment. He will be able to walk or use an exercise bike."

The first four weeks will be gentle, but if everything went

well, Wally could be at gym in three months.

A concern is that Wally doesn't get carried away and do too much in the first weeks.

"Many patients feel a major improvement after surgery, because their deterioration had been quite slow. They need to be careful that they don't rush it," said Biesman-Simons.

However, once fully fit, the sky could be the limit for Wally.

"We have had people who have had bypass operations who have run marathons, and done the Argus cycle tour," Biesman-Simons said.

The major change in Wally's life would be his diet. Nutritionists have to take into consideration his diabetes and keep him on a cholesterol-free diet. Anything containing saturated fats is off the menu.



FOR ALL TO SEE: Wally Katzke bares his heart for all of South Africa to see as surgeon Martin Sussman and his team perform open-heart surgery on SABC3 on Saturday night. The live telecast was the first in SA of a heart bypass operation.

