



Profile: Brandon Dillon

By Trudie Mitschang

BRANDON WAS IN his mid-20s when his first symptoms of common variable immunodeficiency (CVID) began, but it was almost a decade later when he was finally diagnosed. Since then, this active and inspirational athlete has continued to beat the odds by training and participating in numerous athletic events (he completed his first full marathon just six months postdiagnosis). Brandon first shared his story in *IG Living* in 2014. We recently caught up with him to see how he's continuing to inspire and motivate others.

Trudie: For readers not familiar with your story, tell us when you suspected something was wrong with your health.

Brandon: I started experiencing recurring sinus infections and bouts of pneumonia at age 25. From then on, what normally started as cold symptoms would usually turn into sinus infections.

Trudie: Describe what happened when you were 37.

Brandon: In October 2010, a week after my 37th birthday, I was experiencing another cold-turned-sinus infection, and I just couldn't seem to shake it. I ended up going to urgent care because it hurt like crazy just to



Brandon Dillon has come a long way since his CVID diagnosis in 2010. His IVIG infusions make it possible for him to remain healthy and participate in running, cycling, bowling and other physical activities.

breathe. The doctor ordered a chest X-ray and blood work, and when he came back into the exam room, he told me he had good news and bad news. The good news was I had pneumonia, and he was sure it could be treated; the bad news was he was sending me to the hospital because my white blood count was through the roof. I ended up being hospitalized for four days. Luckily, the doctor treating me wanted to know why a relatively healthy 37-year-old was in such bad shape (not only was I fighting pneumonia, I had bacteria in my bloodstream). They ran some tests and consulted with an immunologist at the University of Utah Medical Center who diagnosed me with CVID. Had I waited just one more day to get looked at, I probably wouldn't be here now.

Trudie: What was your life like prior to CVID?

Brandon: Prior to diagnosis, I lived a very normal life. I had a full-time job working for an engineering company, hung out with friends, bowled in leagues a couple of nights a week and was fairly active with running and cycling.

Trudie: What was it like when you got the news?

Brandon: When the doctor came into my hospital room and told me the reason I was so sick was because I had a primary immune disorder, I was terrified. I had no idea what that meant or what my life would be like going forward.

Trudie: How has intravenous immune globulin (IVIG) helped your quality of life?

Brandon: My immunologist told me



with the IVIG infusions, I should be able to maintain a very normal quality of life and do the things I've done in the past. I just have to be a little more conscious about my health and avoid people who are sick, which can be challenging.

Trudie: What advice did your immunologist give you that was especially helpful?

Brandon: One thing he told me on my first visit with him that has stuck with me to this day was the goal from here on was to die *with* CVID, not *of* CVID. I know it sounds kind of morbid, but it really is true.

Trudie: What motivated you to run that first marathon after diagnosis?

Brandon: When my immunologist told me I would be able to have the quality of life I had before my diagnosis, I took that to heart and signed up to run a marathon the following spring. I started training in January, and six months to the day of lying in a hospital bed and receiving my diagnosis, I ran my first full marathon. Up to that point, the longest race I had participated in was a half marathon.

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Trudie: What has changed since you were last featured in our magazine?

Brandon: Since I was last featured in *IG Living*, I feel like my fitness level has improved. I have taken on and finished two Half Ironman-distance

triathlons, my race times seem to be improving, and I just feel good. For example, I participated in an Olympic-distance triathlon last August, finishing fourth overall and first in my age group. That was an awesome feeling.

Trudie: What advice do you have for others who struggle to stay active following a CVID diagnosis?

Brandon: Set aside time each week to get out and do something active — whether that's going for a walk, bike ride, run or anything else you enjoy. You don't have to run marathons or compete in Ironmans, just as long as you feel accomplished at what you're doing. I really feel that getting out and doing something active helps clear the mind and makes you feel good. I might add that it helps to seek out people with similar goals to keep you on track with your fitness goals. Also, signing up for an event such as a 5K, a walk for a cause, etc., is a good way to stay motivated.

Trudie: How do you avoid self-pity?

Brandon: I feel fortunate we found a treatment regimen that works for me and allows me to keep doing what I

love. Saying that, I know there are people out there who have health issues that are a lot worse than mine, so there is no way in my mind I can sit back and take pity on myself.

Trudie: What has living with chronic



Brandon's inspirational attitude helps him push himself physically resulting in a fourth-overall and first-in-his-age-group finish in an Olympic-distance triathlon last August.

illness taught you about yourself?

Brandon: It has taught me I definitely cannot take being healthy for granted because sickness still happens and it will happen. There are times when I'm not feeling well while I'm in the middle of training for an event, and I have to take some time off to feel better and not beat myself up about it. At the end of the day, the running, cycling, bowling and being active are just hobbies I enjoy and are not my full-time job, and if I end up not performing up to my hopes or expectations, then so be it, there is always next time.

Trudie: What are your future goals?

Brandon: I'm getting the itch to run another full marathon, maybe later this fall. I also plan to do another half-distance triathlon this summer because I have some things I need to work on before I take on a full Ironman, which is my ultimate goal. ■

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