

Mayo Clinic News Network

Andy Sandness' smile shows his progress

Video	Audio
SULL0008 (2:23)	'And for you, sir?' "I'll have a coffee and creamer, as well, please."
	It's been two and a half years.
(quick flash of video from surgery with nats)	
SULL0008 (2:28)	'Any additional questions about the menu?' "No, we were just here yesterday, so ..."
(quick flash of video from surgery with nats)	
	Andy Sandness is finally living the life he hoped for.
SULL0011 (4:51)	"I don't get the looks like I used to. I mean, I can just sit down, eat normally, drink normally."
	He enjoys the little things.
SULL0011 (5:54)	"I mean, I can smell pretty good. I mean, my taste is better than my smell, for sure."
	Things most of us take for granted.
SULL0011 (6:57)	"What I like is just being able to smile and being able to have the lip movement and being able to kiss."
	Things that a few years ago he didn't know would be possible for him.
SULL0011 (8:57)	"I made a huge list of all my goals of what I wanted. I wanted function more than anything with the aesthetic looks."
	Ambitious goals considering the results of face transplants are so variable and unpredictable.
SULL0011 (9:32)	"He says well, we're gonna connect all the nerves. He says I think where some of these doctors have slipped is not connecting every nerve. So that's why

	my surgery took 56 hours.”
	"Mmm hmm."
Nats of Dr. Mardini saying “Yes” after his name.	He is Dr. Samir Mardini, the Mayo Clinic surgeon who led a team of dozens that pulled off Andy’s transplant.
Nats of surgery to break up tracks.	Together, they spent more than 50 Saturdays over a three year period planning and practicing every step of the surgery with the team of surgeons, nurses, surgical technicians and anesthesiologists.
	They practiced the nerve surgery every time.
00:06:20 DR. SAMIR MARDINI 01:	“We identified on the donor all the facial nerve branches supplying the area of the face that was transplanted. We – we took pictures, we videotaped, we – we studied what every little branch of those nerves did for the face, and we did the same thing on our patient, on Andy.”
	Connecting them all was a tedious process.
00:06:53 DR. SAMIR MARDINI 01:	“So when we came to connect the nerves together, we had to make sure that every nerve branch matched the perfect nerve branch from the donor and the recipient so that the function is exactly what Andy will try to do when he’s doing his daily life. So if he wants to smile, he thinks about smiling, it goes from his nerve for the smile to the donor nerve for smile, and it creates a smile.”
	For Andy, it was that tedious work connecting the nerves that he thinks made all the difference.
SULL0011 (10:40)	“I was in line one day at the grocery store and the guy says oh man, what happened?”
	It was soon after his surgery when his scars were more noticeable and the nerves were still regenerating.

SULL0011 (10:40)	"He's like, did you get in a car wreck? Like, no man, it's a little bit bigger than that."
00:08:40 DR. SAMIR MARDINI 01:	"That was our goal. So success for us was measured in multiple fronts, but ultimately success is Andy walking into a store, not being noticed as someone abnormal in any way, talking to the person at the counter, they talk to him back, they don't think twice about him, and he moves on his day. That's a success to us, and that's what we were able to achieve in Andy's case."
	"And a sauce on the side for you." "Perfect."
	It's what Andy always wanted: to be just another face in the crowd.
SULL0011 (12:36)	"Just going into a restaurant or stores, I mean, I feel normal."
SULL0011 (12:44)	"And nobody stares like they used to. I mean, I just sit down, I can talk, I can speak fairly clear."
(12:52)	"It's part of me. It's, like, my face.
	Two and a half years later, the payoff from those extra hours in the operating room continues to grow.
SULL0011 (7:18)	"The nerves, they're still growing."
	"Hahaha."
	And his smile ... proof of success.
SULL0011 (13:00)	"There's no part of me that's uncomfortable anymore. Like, when I walk into a restaurant I'm not uncomfortable, or go into a store, or see the kids or anybody that used to scare me; like when those situations where you try to avoid those situations. There's no situation that I don't want to be in anymore."
	For the Mayo Clinic News Network, I'm Ian Roth.