

The Oregonian

Aloha cyclist diagnosed with kidney disease prepares for three-day ride

September 10, 13

Two days after receiving his first round of kidney dialysis in July 2012, Ray Hennings hopped on his bike.

It was the Aloha man's first ride in months, and after just three miles, he was exhausted.

But he kept at it, and now the 59-year-old is gearing up for the three-day, 220-mile [Tour DaVita](#) in South Carolina.

The tour, which starts Sunday, is sponsored by DaVita HealthCare Partners, a kidney care company. Hennings hopes his participation will encourage people with kidney diseases to remain active and others to consider donating a kidney to someone in need.

Hennings, who has [polycystic kidney disease](#), knew he was at risk for the disease from a young age. Polycystic kidney disease is genetic, and his mother, sister and cousin have all been diagnosed with it, he said. Hennings was diagnosed with the disease when he was in his mid-20s, and a few years ago, the growing cysts began to take their toll on his kidney function.

Because kidneys filter toxins from the bloodstream and help maintain a healthy red blood cell count, Hennings started to feel fatigued, had trouble remembering things and gained weight.

In 2011, his kidney function had dipped below 18 percent, and he put his name on a list for a transplant.

About a year later, Hennings started dialysis treatments, and now he goes to the DaVita Hillsboro Dialysis Center three days each week for four-hour sessions to remove the toxins from his blood.

Since starting dialysis, Hennings has lost 40 pounds and has gotten back in cycling shape – he now rides about 25 to 60 miles each day.

Hennings is still waiting for a new kidney, but he's focusing on staying healthy in the mean time.

"It makes me feel like a lot less of a victim, when there's something I have control over," he said. But his kidneys, which should weigh less than half a pound each if they were healthy, now weigh 10 pounds each, due to the growing cysts.

"I'm basically carrying a baby," he said.

Though he has completed double century (200 miles per day) rides and [Cycle Oregon](#) numerous times since he started seriously cycling in 1988, the Tour DaVita will be his first multi-day riding event since he began dialysis. He plans to fly to Greenville, S.C., on Friday, receive dialysis at a local DaVita center on Saturday, and set off on the first leg of the ride on Sunday.

His longtime friend and cycling buddy Tom Rasmussen, of Simsbury, Conn., said he can't wait to ride with Hennings, who he said inspires him.

The two first met at Cycle Oregon in 1988, and their friendship has grown over the course of many rides over the years. Rasmussen became involved with Tour DaVita through a family member in 2010, and has completed the annual ride each year since. This year, the two friends aim to complete the tour together.

Rasmussen said his friend's tenacity to live an active lifestyle and sign up for a long bike tour isn't anything new, even with kidney disease.

"It didn't surprise me at all, simply because he's always been a biker," Rasmussen said. "He's that type of a person who just won't give up."

Hennings, who is working on his master's degree in geography at Portland State University, said he's thankful he's still able to be physically active.

"I can't keep up with my fastest friends, but I can still go out and do what I want to do," he said. "So I'm really pleased with that."

Now, Hennings wants to show others on dialysis that physical activity isn't always off-limits.

"Usually," he said, "you can do more than you think you can."

-- Anna Marum