

Full face and hand transplants give badly burned man ‘new chance at life’

Almost six months after a rare face and hands transplant, Joe DiMeo is relearning how to smile, blink, pinch and squeeze.

The 22-year-old New Jersey resident had the operation last August, two years after being badly burned in a car crash.

“I knew it would be baby steps all the way,” DiMeo told The Associated Press. “You’ve got to have a lot of motivation, a lot of patience. And you’ve got to stay strong through everything.”

Experts say it appears the surgery at NYU Langone Health was a success, but warn it’ll take some time to say for sure.

Worldwide, surgeons have completed at least 18 face transplants and 35 hand transplants.

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“The fact they could pull it off is phenomenal,” said Dr. Bohdan Pomahac, a surgeon at Boston’s Brigham and Women’s Hospital who led the second [ever face and double hand transplant attempt]. “I know firsthand it’s incredibly complicated. It’s a tremendous success.”

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DiMeo, who lives with his parents, can now dress and feed himself. He shoots pool and plays with his dog Buster. Once an avid gym-goer, DiMeo is also working out again — benching 50 pounds and practicing his golf swing.

“You got a new chance at life. You really can’t give up,” he said.

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