

My Journey to becoming Active!

In 2004, I left the Armed Forces after completing 25 years' service. At the time of discharge I had an underactive thyroid and was diagnosed with asthma. In 2009 I was struck down with a devastating illness which resulted in me being admitted to hospital.

I can't describe what goes through your mind when you suddenly lose your sight, your speech and you are disempowered to make your own decisions. Days went past in a blur of unbelievable pain, paralysis, MRIs, CAT scans, trips to ophthalmology, morphine and hopelessness. Time passed and the frustrations grew as there were still no answers, still no diagnosis – just the message that there was nothing wrong with me... until one day, bingo!

The Suicide Headache (CLUSTER MIGRAINE)

I was told I was suffering from The Suicide Headache, or "cluster migraines", and the journey took a new and improved different direction. I was prescribed the right medication and I had outpatients' appointments with neurology – but the attacks still kept coming. During this time, my pharmacy submission for replenishing medication was a full scale military operation; I needed my medication, injections and oxygen. It was my lifeline, and it still is. For six long years now I have battled with 'the beast' with the support of my carer, and luckily for me, two great GPs who have supported me from the day I was discharged from the hospital.

The black dog theory and mental scars

Throughout this journey I did not realise the mental damage being inflicted. It can be hard to realise or understand, hard to self-diagnose, but

looking back I know that a level of depression set in.

As that happened my weight got out of hand; clothes' shopping was spent avoiding mirrors, buying the big range in waist sized trousers and looking for the easy fix and standardised clothing to get me through the working day.

As time progressed, my condition and behaviour started to take its' toll on everyone around me, and this is what brought me to face up to reality. I realised I was mentally abusing my loved ones and myself with my condition and if I didn't take action, I was going to jeopardise everything I have worked for. I knew I had to get motivated and get moving.

The Fix and Road to Recovery

I set myself what seemed like a simple target – run to the office from the off-site car park. It turned out to be anything but. Within seconds of starting my lungs were set to burst and my legs felt like I was running with two blocks of concrete attached to each foot.

My plan run to work from the car and back at the end of the day - not even a mile each way – but physically I couldn't do it.

But I knew I needed to do something, so I persevered and kept going every day in the week, and started using the weekends for long walks with the 'wolf pack' – my three dogs Alfie, Jasper and Brody.



After three months it had started to get easier, so I extended my route and I started to notice the weight dropping; not too fast, but enough to see that my appearance was changing.

Around this time, I read an article about someone who used a FitBit watch to help reduce weight by completing 20,000 steps a day, so I gave it a go and purchased a FitBit, hoping to build on the work I was already doing. This really supported my personal challenge by allowing me to set my own goals to achieve the minimum recommended 10,000 steps and walk five miles a day.

But it had another side too – the Fitbit app has a social element where you can invite friends to join challenges, to encourage others in their journey and I saw an opportunity to extend what I was doing and make it something more people could benefit from.

So I set up the “Workweek Hustle” through on the FitBit app, and began to encourage my work colleagues to do more walking, activity and exercise. That group has been taken up enthusiastically by a lot of my

colleagues. My journey began with a terrible setback, but I am privileged to be able to see that it has become something positive for people around me.

Where am I today?



My medication has been reduced and I have had a pain free year. Long may it continue! My asthma is under control and my inhalers have been reduced and improving my lung capacity. I feel in a really good place, both physically and mentally. The results of my active lifestyle have highlighted savings against my medication reduction.

I take regular exercise and play a part in activities at work. It has made a huge difference having a great support network around me and I no longer look over my shoulder waiting for my next attack. If it happens, I feel I am in a good place to manage it with the education I received for managing pain.

Since I started the ‘Workweek Hustle’ I have reached over 20,000 steps per day, and I take an active role in the top group where we are each achieving more than 100,000 steps every working week.

The ‘Workweek Hustle’ has become the ‘Health and Hustle Group’ with more than 70+ active members and growing. We have walking schemes,

running schemes, we've even had a boot camp. Events are running at multiple sites.

I am going to manage this scheme using our NHS Trust's Listening into Action approach. The aim is to embed activity into our organisation and so support staff to lead a healthy lifestyle, both in and outside of work. I suspect the success of this may go even further and allow other health partners to take part in future challenges.

What have I learnt?

As an individual you have to take ownership to make a healthy lifestyle change. Pushing someone to become active will result in resistance; they will push back and find a hundred reasons or excuses not to - just like I did.

Encouragement and support from colleagues, family and friends will help and support you once you get started. The hardest thing, the absolute hardest thing, is getting started. But in time you start to enjoy the 'WOW Factor' when people start noticing the weight reduction and change of your mood from a negative to a more positive one.

When I discussed the running group with individuals, the first thing going through everyone's mind, and mine, was about 'coming last'.

But these activities are about being part of something, about a team, about personal goals and about injecting some fun into it. My focus is to arrange a wide range of activities which are for everyone, no matter what their ability or fitness levels are.

Where is this going and what's next?



No idea! But I hope to carry on meeting inspiring people who I work with to keep me motivated and provide encouragement to those who struggle like I did. Since starting this network, I have met colleagues who have worse health conditions than me, which has inspired me even more, not only to achieve my goals, but also to share my knowledge and personal journey to support them in taking control of their condition and lifestyle.

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One of the hardest parts of my journey is revealing my personal account and taking responsibility for changing my lifestyle. I hope I can use this to inspire others who have been in the same position as me. It takes one step followed by another. Thank You for taking the time to read my pathway to becoming active!