

COPD - Sarah's story

For one Greenwich resident, a trip to the high street meant regularly stopping and pretending to look in shop windows to hide her embarrassment at being out of breath. Sarah, who smoked her first cigarette at age 11, was diagnosed with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) in 2008 after a routine health check showed signs of reduced lung function.

COPD includes conditions such as chronic bronchitis, emphysema and some cases of chronic asthma.

The former smoker said it was two years before she noticed symptoms of breathlessness and fatigue which left her gasping for air without warning.

“I used to walk for miles. I used to love walking and I could go out walking for at least two hours,” Sarah said.

“Then I couldn’t even get up out of the chair without being out of breath... it’s very frightening.”

“When it first started I thought I was on my own but you don’t realise the number of other people who are also affected.”

Sarah’s GP encouraged her to attend pulmonary rehabilitation classes at a local leisure centre.

“I thought, ‘What’s that going to do? I can’t breathe, how am I going to exercise?’...but it was marvellous,” she said.

“Physios are there, they monitor you with your exercising and they push you a little further...they gave me my life back.”

When the course ended, Sarah signed up as a volunteer and now helps others twice a week.

She said the classes gave her the skills and confidence to work out at her local gym four days a week and enjoy holidays abroad again.

Plumstead Health Centre specialist physiotherapist Helen Jefford said pulmonary rehabilitation classes aimed to help people with COPD who were becoming increasingly breathless.

“The evidence reports that patients who attend pulmonary rehab feel less breathless, fitter and have an improved quality of life,” Ms Jefford said.

“Physiotherapists are instrumental in delivering the classes. They are experts in the prescription of exercise when managing patients with chronic lung disease,” she said.

Pulmonary rehab classes offer tailored exercise plans and education sessions presented by a range of healthcare professionals, she said.

Pregnancy-related urinary incontinence – comedian Elaine Miller’s story

A Scottish physiotherapist’s plan to help women with a wee problem is proving laughter is good medicine.

Comedian Elaine Miller is using her own experience of pregnancy-related incontinence to help the one-in-three UK women with the condition.

Her educational stand-up show Gusset Grippers was named Weirdest Show of the 2013 Edinburgh Fringe Festival.

Miller, a mum of three, said research revealed a program of three exercises performed three times daily for 16 weeks could bring relief to 80 per cent of sufferers.

“I couldn’t get my head around the stats,” the Edinburgh resident said.

“Physiotherapy is the best thing to manage it (incontinence) and prevent it from happening.”

Miller said the pelvic floor’s job was to “squeeze and lift” but it could become overloaded during pregnancy or from having a body mass index above 35, leading to incontinence.

Miller said she experienced incontinence after her children were born, but was too exhausted to think about pelvic floor exercises.

“The times I did used to wet myself I was lugging a pram with a baby, had a toddler behind the pram and a reluctant preschooler in tow.

“The forces women deal with at that stage of life are really significant,” she said.

She said: “Once I started doing it (exercises) it worked and I’m kind of ashamed to say I was a bit surprised.”

Miller said a chance conversation at the school gate revealed how little other mums knew about the benefits of pelvic floor exercises.

“Because it wasn’t a patient consultation, I was being a bit irreverent... then I thought perhaps I could use humour to sell the message,” she said.

Miller also hosts "pelvic floor parties" to educate women and regularly receives follow-up emails from guests who were too embarrassed to ask questions.

“If you get people laughing, they will start having a conversation and that’s all it seems to take,” she said.

Multiple Sclerosis - Mark's story

From daily injections to once-a-month physiotherapy, Mark Auld has come a long way in his management of Multiple Sclerosis (MS).

The Musselburgh resident was just 30 when he first developed symptoms of the autoimmune condition, after waking one day with “pins and needles” in his hand.

His condition quickly deteriorated and Mark found himself unable to walk further than his local shop to pick up the newspaper. As his condition, diagnosed as relapsing remitting MS, became worse, he had to leave his job as media manager for National Rail in Scotland and forfeited much of his social life.

Now 39, Mark credits a positive mindset, determination and specialist physiotherapy in helping him regain control of his life.

“I thought, when I hit 40, I don’t want to be where I was at 30,” Mark said.

“You have to be quite disciplined. If you walk 100 yards one day, try 120 the next – it’s mind over matter.”

In March 2013 Mark began physiotherapy with Chongsu Lee, a chartered physiotherapist specialising in an MS treatment that focuses on gentle massage and mobilisation of the spine.

“It has worked wonders on me,” he said.

With the advice and guidance of Chongsu, Mark set goals to improve his movement and stability and said the support had helped him “without a doubt”.

“The fact that I got to the point where I was able to stretch to replace the light bulb was a big thing,” he said.

“Now the biggest thing for me is to walk up the stairs unaided.”

He also hopes to return to employed work, after successfully managing two days of voluntary work.

Mark is currently in remission, which means his MS is in a period where the symptoms are mild or can disappear altogether. This can last for days, weeks or possibly even months.

Chongsu said Mark had progressed in leaps and bounds since his first appointment in March 2013.

“When I saw him, he was very shaky, his balance was poor and he was only able to walk for about five minutes,” he said.

“Treatment is important but individual commitment is very important as well. Lots of people with MS agree stress aggravates symptoms, so Mark is very good at not putting himself under too much pressure.”

The owner of Point One Clinic, which has branches in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and the Scottish Borders, said he developed his type of treatment through close monitoring of his patients’ improvements after using the technique. A PhD research project on the treatment style will be funded by Medical Research Scotland next year at Edinburgh Napier University.