

MY JOURNEY

of becoming Healthier by taking Responsibility!



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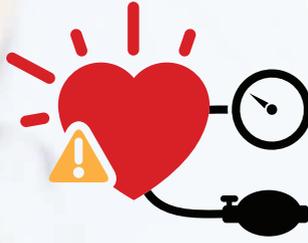
This is my story of how I became so ill I ended up in hospital thinking I was going to die! But I've always said 'there is always good that comes out of bad'!

My hospitalisation was all due to a 'lifestyle' that had crept up on me over several years – a 'lifestyle' that probably applies to so many others who just innocently fall in to a trap that is so difficult to get out of and one that a lot of us just ignore and end up being dishonest with ourselves making every excuse under the sun not to do something about it.

I want to share with you my journey to date of me taking responsibility to improve my health and wellbeing with the hope to help you, or a member of your family or even a friend so they can avoid what I have been through.

I am 53 years old, married since 1987 with three children aged 22 to 27 years and four grandchildren aged between 6 months and 5 years. I have always classed myself as 'Mr Average'. I considered myself as being reasonably fit and healthy – I played every sport available in my school days reaching a reasonable standard of rugby and cricket. I carried on my sporting life after school with rugby and cricket at local clubs but gave both up in 1997 at the age of 33. Although in 2000, I re-started my passion for skiing following a 17-year break and have skied every year since bar one but, in essence, I had stopped exercising.





Following me fracturing my spine in a skiing accident seven years ago at the age of 46, was when I first started to think I just didn't feel right – I continually felt tired, slept at strange times, unusual aches and pains, itching skin, even loss of hair!

My blood pressure was regularly high - 170/100, my blood sugar levels were at an elevated level – 5.9, I weighed nearly 16 stone and I was now having to buy 38-inch waist trousers all of which culminated in October 2016, with me being rushed in to hospital with a suspected heart attack, thinking that this was the end for me.

Looking back, it could be said that my health had progressively declined over several years without me realising it - not an uncommon occurrence for people over the age of 40! If I can advise any one, listen to what your body is telling you – both in the mirror (I will explain this later) and how you feel!



So why might this have been?

Well as I say, I gave up regular exercise with my rugby and cricket when I was 33 other than skiing for a week, once a year so you can't really count that as regular exercise.

If I'm honest with myself, I didn't really take any notice of what I was eating either – instead of a takeaway being a treat once a month, it was now a weekly (if not more often) part of our family eating routine. My diet included snacking (crisps and chocolate) and a high amount of carbohydrates (potatoes and bread).

On reflection, I also hadn't considered the potential damage my work could be having on me. I have worked in the leisure industry since 1985 with the last 15 years in a senior management role which is very much office based and certainly stressful – both of which can cause problems to people's health although I didn't realise these were going to be a contributing factor of putting me in hospital with potential heart failure!

Everyone thinks that working in a leisure centre means I use them all the time, but nothing could be further from the truth - it's like a 'busman's holiday' – do I really want to spend my spare time at my place of work (I spend more than enough time working) so I have always chosen not to take advantage of all the great facilities – or at least until recently.

I have always been one of those who says that I'm happy with my body shape, but when I look back, since I turned 40, I used to wake up most mornings, look in the mirror and think to myself I would like to lose a few pounds – a bit like when I used to smoke and say that I don't want to give it up as I loved smoking but deep down knew I wanted to give it up as I knew it was no good for me – the evidence is that it kills.

So, with a decline in regular exercise i.e. nothing, an office based and stressful job, being a smoker with poor eating habits it's not surprising I ended up in hospital – I had finally woken up to the fact that my 'lifestyle' was trying to kill me as was my smoking!

I finally gave up smoking cigarettes in 2014.



I had my 'wake-up call' and I certainly didn't want to choose to leave my family without a husband, a dad and a granddad.

Like a lot of us, we regularly try to self-diagnose ourselves on how we are feeling often via googling for information – my self-diagnosing started when I broke my back skiing, I often thought to myself 'I just don't feel right'!

If I believed what I researched it told me I could have cancer, leukaemia, diabetes, heart disease and lots more other concerning illnesses with all the advice being 'change your lifestyle' but I always chose to ignore this advice – even though I knew it was good advice.

The most crucial element of my journey has been to be HONEST with myself – more often than not we always make excuses – I certainly did, with not enough time, I'm happy with myself, I'm not stressed and many more, yet in my own heart I knew I wanted to change things but didn't until it was nearly too late.

So my first advice is that if you think you might need to lose a few pounds then be honest with yourself as you most probably do, if you think you could improve your eating then be honest with yourself as you most probably do, if you think you enjoy smoking then be honest with yourself as you probably know it will kill you at some stage, if you think you don't feel right then be honest with yourself as you are most probably right – just be honest with yourself and take responsibility for doing something about it.



So, what did I do about it?

Well I suppose I was lucky that, in the prominent position I hold in my job, I was not only able to help myself personally i.e. having access to all the wide-ranging exercise facilities, but I was also able to change the way we at the leisure centres operate and prioritise the service.

The leisure industry has always focused its attention on increasing people's activity or exercising through gym memberships, swimming, classes, squash/badminton etc often supported by a café outlet in the attempt to help people lose weight. For the last forty years, this approach has only ever attracted a maximum average of only 14% of the national population participating in these activities and I have been no different although in Gravesham we have achieved 18%. As a leader in the leisure industry I am now saying that the industry shouldn't be proud to stand up and say we have achieved any level of greatness achieving only 14% of the community participating in a healthy lifestyle. In June 2015, I was in a Fitness Team meeting, my eyes were truly opened, and I started to begin to finally be honest with myself!

One of our Instructors, Paul Jones, was brave enough to get up and said, 'we need to change our direction if we want to really help people with them losing weight'. It was explained that 80% of people's problem is related to what they eat and only 20% associated to exercising. Some examples of good things to eat were shown to us and all of this set my business mind in to overdrive as the leisure industry is all about increasing people's exercising and not all about what people are eating – yet eating, I was told, is 80% of the problem!

The first thing I did after the Fitness Team meeting was to weigh myself – 15st 2lbs with an upper ideal weight of 13st 2lbs (I was at least 2st overweight). I have never understood why some say not to weigh yourself – they call it the naughty step! – bearing in mind it is losing weight that will change your body shape, surely weighing yourself is something you need to do!

I now wanted to try out for myself this new eating philosophy Paul Jones was talking about.

I first changed my lunch. 5 times a week I was eating a pack-up of a white breaded sandwich, a bag of crisps, a chocolate biscuit and a small carton of orange juice. Since then, 5 days a week I now have a small pot of olives, a pot of fruit and Greek yogurt, a pot of nuts and raisins and a bottle of water. I started to lose weight – within 8 weeks, I had lost 10llbs, just by changing the content of my lunch! I was now convinced that what we eat really makes a difference to become a healthier person – Paul Jones was right!

The fitness team and I agreed to start a new 12-week programme for our members – the Better Body Programme. It was based on not just exercise but heavily on nutrition (looking at what people eat). Time and time again, we were having success after success – one client improved her wellbeing so much that she fell pregnant having been trying for many years.

I was now even more convinced that this was the right way for me and the organisation to be venturing if we really wanted to be successful to help people change their body shapes, which is most people's reason for going to the gym/classes/swimming etc.



So, what did I do next?

Well, through all my discussions with my valued friend Vasu, I have learnt such a lot about preventing myself from becoming another statistic of a 'lifestyle' illness and the subsequent chances of me going through a lot of pain even possibly dying 10-years earlier than I should. I also learnt through Simon Senek how best to apply my new learnt knowledge in to business terms.

2016 was a year I continued to learn about what else I needed to do to address some of the things I was experiencing and feeling, and I continued to slowly lose weight. By October 2016 my weight had been reduced to 14st, so in a period of 15 months I had lost 1st 2llbs, which I was really pleased with, but I still suffered from high blood pressure, feeling more stressed and my sugar levels were still higher than I wanted them to be.

October 2016 was the month of my real 'life changing' experience – my wake-up call being rushed in to hospital with a suspected heart attack. The build-up of work related stress was the main cause of my problems with my body and mind not being able to cope, and I started to slowly 'shut down'. However, I survived this painful experience with the support of my work colleagues but more importantly my family and typical 'Mr Average' returned to work six-weeks later in December feeling a completely different person – I realised I was never going to be the same; my outlook on life had changed.

Vasu bought me a Christmas present in December 2016 – a book called The 8-Week Blood Sugar Diet by Dr Michael Mosely. By the end of Boxing Day, I had completed reading the book, which is a record for me as I generally don't enjoy reading books. Michael Mosely had taught me the three key proven aspects of preventing the 'lifestyle illnesses' of type 2 diabetes – nutrition (reducing carbohydrates with a Mediterranean style diet), exercise (getting hot, sweaty and slightly out of breath) and mindfulness (looking after the mind is as important as looking after your body).

I soon realised that I was only really applying one of these to my own lifestyle and that was the nutrition element. I hadn't started exercising and I knew nothing about mindfulness. I thought honestly to myself 'perhaps this is why I ended up in hospital' – I'm not committed to everything I need to be i.e. nutrition, exercise and mindfulness!

From a business perspective, I realised we needed to employ someone who could help the company on its health journey, so I employed a fantastic, professionally qualified nutritionist, Heather Smith in January 2017 who absolutely believes and is committed to helping us all not to become another statistic.



Heather soon confirmed that sugar is the main problem to prevent us from 'lifestyle' illnesses and that reducing our carbohydrate intake is also another focus we all need to take.

The trouble is, sugar and carbohydrates taste so good, but ones we need to resist! A bit like with me with my lunch change – it's about changing our taste buds and avoiding temptations and Heather can help educate you on your own personal requirements – she's certainly helped me.

In addition to changing the content of my lunch to olives, blueberries, strawberries with Greek yogurt, nuts and raisins and a bottle of water, I have learnt to change my breakfast too. I now only have, 5 days a week, rolled oats with milk and have nearly eradicated sugar from my food intake. I very rarely eat bread (a reduction in carbohydrates), reduced my potato intake and certainly reduced my snacking (other than a small pot of nuts and raisins to get me by).

By February 2017, we had developed a new programme to start addressing type 2 diabetes, as this was our main focus at the time. The programme is called Fix Type 2. As part of this programme, we invested in a body analysis machine BODITRAX – a machine that creates your own personal account that records 20 clinically validated health measurements. This would help people to find out their current condition i.e. a starting point, and record how they were doing on an ongoing basis.

My first analysis showed me a worrying set of results!

My weight had slightly increased to 14st 2lbs, my BMI was 26.8 (not too bad but not too good either), my metabolic age wasn't too bad at 50 years, but my visceral fat score was at 11 (far too high). Visceral fat is the fat that coats important internal organs such as the pancreas, liver and heart and reduces their capacity to work properly e.g. the pancreas will not be able to produce the correct levels of insulin therefore possibly causing the onset of type 2 diabetes.



The Boditrax assessment was another ‘wake-up call’ for me – I needed to do more if I wanted to reduce my visceral fat score. So, I started to actually think about exercising – for the first time in 20 years!

This coincided with me having some business discussions on the mix of using technology with fitness, which concluded in May 2017 with us purchasing the extremely motivating Myzone belt system.

I started exercising with my Myzone belt in May 2017 and I must say it is a very motivational piece of technology that keeps you interested in exercising, at a certain level, that achieves results.

By May, my weight had reduced to 13st 11llbs, my visceral fat score was still at 11, my BMI was still higher than I wanted it to be at 26.5 and my metabolic age had reduced to 48.

The third aspect Michael Mosley taught me was mindfulness – looking after the mind!

Mindfulness originates from Buddhism and is all about how to relax. I base my mindfulness on using an App called Headspace which teaches you breathing exercises. I also use sauna, steam and spa to help me relax but yoga, Pilates and tai chi are also all very good for mindfulness.



Mindfulness

So, what have I achieved so far?

By December 2017, with me having changed my breakfast and lunch 5 days a week, started using the Myzone exercise programme for 8 months, and practising some simple mindfulness philosophies, I have improved my weight to 12st 13lbs, visceral fat to 9, BMI to 24.5 and metabolic age to 38yrs. To say I am pleased is an understatement!

With my new taught nutritional knowledge, from June 2015 to April 2017, I lost 1st in weight. But when I added exercise and mindfulness to my lifestyle in May 2017 to December 2017, I lost a further 1st 3lbs – a total of 2st 3lbs lost in 2½ years.

But weight is not the only benefit.

My resting heart rate has decreased to 62, and my maximum heart capacity has increased to 177 – my heart is much healthier and my recovery from exercising is much quicker.

My blood pressure has decreased to 110/83.

My BMI has decreased from 28.8 to 26.5.

I have a metabolic age of a 38-year-old – 15 years younger than I should be.

I am better hydrated with drinking water being part of my daily routine.

My aerobic capacity has dramatically improved – my first Myzone exercise session I couldn't run 1km, my last session I ran 7.2km.

My body shape has dramatically changed with my belly much flatter.

I am less stressed, and I generally feel good.

Yes, I've been taught and changed my eating habits, yes, I've started motivated exercising, yes, I practise mindfulness, yes, I have improved my health and wellbeing. Yes, it's not been easy, yes, it's taken me 2½ years to get to where I am now, but I still have relapses. I compare it to being an alcoholic and 'falling off the wagon'. I still have takeaways, have a few too many alcoholic drinks, go weeks without an exercise session and forget to do my mindfulness training i.e. I 'fall off the wagon; the difference now is that I know how to get back on the 'wagon'.



My Summary

We all know that smoking kills! The sooner we all realise that sugar and a high intake of carbohydrates is also killing us, the sooner we can prevent ourselves from suffering from the complications of a 'lifestyle illness'.

Don't be fooled that it is easy – it's not and it's sometimes painful, particularly the exercising. Don't be fooled that there is a short-term fix – there isn't, it's all about changing a lifestyle for good, not temporarily.

Be honest with yourself and realise that you need help to be taught what is good to eat and how to exercise and how to practise mindfulness – I needed it and I work in the industry which is supposed to be helping us!

Don't believe it costs a lot – eating a Mediterranean type of diet doesn't have to be expensive, just look at what some takeaways cost!

And take note that it's not just about what you eat or just about how much you exercise or just about how much you practise mindfulness – it's got to be a combination of ALL three to get maximum benefit – they all go hand-in-hand.



So, what can I do for you?

Gravesham Community Leisure Limited is the company I work for and we manage Cascades, Cygnet and Swanscombe Leisure Centres in Kent.

We have now built a nutritional/exercise/mindfulness service around your needs but specific to your abilities. This new service is completely supported by a wonderful and talented team of highly qualified and experienced advisors, all desperately wanting to help you.

So, whether you are already fit and just want to change your body shape or whether you are on the verge of suffering from a 'lifestyle illness' or indeed already suffering from one, my advice to you is to take advantage of our health services and support.

You might be reading this and think you may not need our help but remember 'be honest with yourself', don't wait like I did until it was nearly too late! If you are a white male with a waist size of 37 inches or more (35 inches for Asian men) or a female with a waist size of 31.5 inches or more then you are classed as being 'at risk'. Another indicator of 'risk' is your BMI score. If this is 30 or higher please get in touch with us to help you to prevent your problems getting any worse.

Just a reminder – waist size is around your belly button and not your hips!

Some of us need more support than others and our service is based around being totally flexible to your needs.

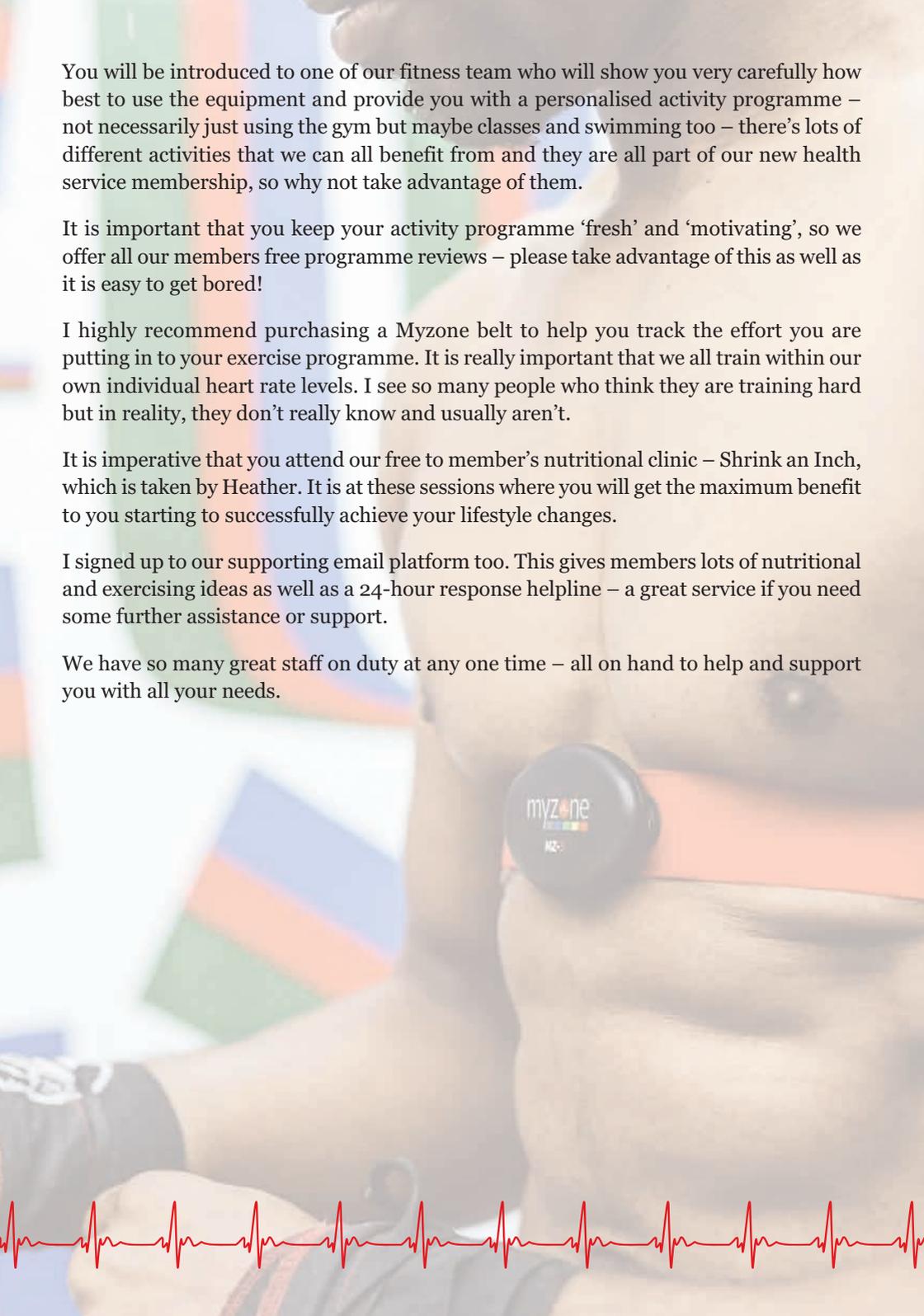
If you need to meet on a one-to-one basis with Heather, our professional and highly qualified Nutritionist (our equivalent to a GP) you can. She will certainly help you to get started.

Signing up is really easy with the support of our friendly Membership Team.

You will receive your own personalised membership card, which you will need to access the facility, health service and the equipment.

Use of our Boditrax assessment machine is free and a really good place to start to know and understand your body. It is recommended that you have a monthly assessment to monitor what affect all the hard work you put in is having on your body composition as it creates your own personal and private account.



A close-up photograph of a person's midsection wearing a black Myzone heart rate monitor belt with an orange strap. The person is shirtless, and their skin is visible. In the background, there are colorful flags (blue, orange, green, white) and a blurred figure of another person. The overall image has a soft, slightly faded appearance.

You will be introduced to one of our fitness team who will show you very carefully how best to use the equipment and provide you with a personalised activity programme – not necessarily just using the gym but maybe classes and swimming too – there’s lots of different activities that we can all benefit from and they are all part of our new health service membership, so why not take advantage of them.

It is important that you keep your activity programme ‘fresh’ and ‘motivating’, so we offer all our members free programme reviews – please take advantage of this as well as it is easy to get bored!

I highly recommend purchasing a Myzone belt to help you track the effort you are putting in to your exercise programme. It is really important that we all train within our own individual heart rate levels. I see so many people who think they are training hard but in reality, they don’t really know and usually aren’t.

It is imperative that you attend our free to member’s nutritional clinic – Shrink an Inch, which is taken by Heather. It is at these sessions where you will get the maximum benefit to you starting to successfully achieve your lifestyle changes.

I signed up to our supporting email platform too. This gives members lots of nutritional and exercising ideas as well as a 24-hour response helpline – a great service if you need some further assistance or support.

We have so many great staff on duty at any one time – all on hand to help and support you with all your needs.



My Final Comment

I would say to anyone - please don't let yourself fall in to the lifestyle trap like I did, don't ignore the mirror or how you are feeling – take responsibility and action before it may be too late – it's a very lonely and scary place being as ill as I was, I wouldn't want anyone to have to go through what I had to endure. Take responsibility for your own nutrition/exercise/mindfulness because it is no one else's responsibility!



Acknowledgements

I must take this opportunity to thank Paul Jones, Dr Vasudaven DL, Simon Senek, Dr Michael Mosely and Heather Smith for helping and supporting me to re-evaluate my personal wellbeing, which I am now able to implement critical and mind-set changes to the leisure industry I work in.

I realise it's a journey that I have only just embarked on but I'm now on it and I intend to stay on it, so thank you all very much – you may well all be responsible for changing the leisure industry to becoming one that is led by health and not just increasing people's activity/exercise!



