

CHOOSE LIFE

11:30 on 20th November 2015 marked the end of one part of my life and the beginning of another. I had coronary heart attack.

Fortunately it didn't actually end my life as I survived, but it did end the lifestyle that involved alcohol dependency, over consumption of fatty foods, excessive unnecessary stress and lack of exercise.

Going from someone who had always thought of themselves as healthy to overnight being a patient was difficult to adjust but I did look for the causes and then the solutions. A wake-up call is only beneficial if you do wake-up, which meant in my case waking myself up to what I was doing to my body and a new-found resolution to take action to choose health and choose life.

Why did I take a new job that was too stressful and too demanding for me? Why then did I turn to alcohol and food with the resulting weight gain and how could the onset of autumn could possibly explain my total abandonment of the minimal amount of exercise I was doing?

After many weeks in hospital where I had coronary stents fitted to the diseased artery I was deemed to be physically healed but mentally I was far from healed. I had an attitude of gratitude, but I knew action needed to be taken and frequently said to myself – *"Everything happens for a reason"*.

The cardiac rehab programme offered by the NHS was very good and gave me a lot of useful information as well as showing me there was plenty of exercises I could and indeed should do. Also being in a group of other people who had also suffered cardiac episodes gave me the comfort of knowing I was not the only one who was dealing with this.

I researched everything I could about my new challenge, indeed you could have called my Dr Google, but research was not enough – I took action. The first big decision was to totally give up alcohol and to be honest I didn't really miss it and I still don't. I changed my diet into a low-fat mission and lost a lot of weight – nearly 3 stones to be exact. I religiously took my medication, which was a new thing for me, but every tablet was necessary, and any side effects, which were minimal were handled.

Within three months I was back to work, working away from home in the same job but this time it was different. I put myself first instead of the job and on occasions I learnt to say no and mean it. Dealing with stress in this way meant saying "no" to the task not no to the person. My body was adjusting though to the shock of the episode and all the lifestyle changes I had made, and this may have resulted in the gallstones that surfaced in my digestive system. Two operations to extract the painful stones duly followed and also my gallbladder was removed.

Buying a Garmin VivoActive smart watch not allowed me to monitor my heart rate but also had a step counter which was very motivating to keeping to my daily target of between 8 to 10 thousand steps a day. Walking was my new medication.

During my repeated occurrence of gallstone pain where my will was being challenged by many emergency visits to hospital I made what was a life changing decision – I decided to leave my job and effectively take early retirement. *I put health before wealth*. As I have said before – *Everything happens for a reason*.

This year (2019) has marked a number of milestones. I have started playing golf again and re-joined my old club, Bristol and Clifton. I have joined a gym, the excellent Anytime Fitness gym in Yate and sold my E-Bike and bought a “normal” bike again.

I would encourage anyone who has survived a health scare such as a cardiac episode, to take a look at yourself and realise that you can make changes, you do have choices and if you do make the best choices for you, you can have a better life as I am now enjoying right now. Take responsibility for your own health and your own life, use healthcare services when you need to and always take expert medical advice at every step of the way. Take good care of yourself and choose life!

Simon Bailey November 2019