

## **ARTHRITIS...My Story**

**John, 55, developed knee problems after 20 years of manual work. Here he reveals how his problem was diagnosed and treated and the changes he has made to his lifestyle as a result.**

### **My diagnosis**

*“A year ago I was told that I had osteoarthritis of the knee.*

*My knees had been hurting for a while and felt stiff and painful to move. Rather than getting any better it just kept getting worse. I was feeling old before my time. I was only in my fifties and my knees were so stiff I was struggling to get about. That’s why I went to my GP. I got sent off for some X- rays and that’s when they told me its arthritis.*

*OK it’s not going to kill me but it’s not fun being told ‘this is the reason your knees hurt – the bad news is there is no cure’. That’s not what you want to hear. I remember thinking ‘is that it then. Am I going to be shuffling about and having to put up with this pain for the rest of my life? ‘I wondered if I would be able to carry on at work too.”*

### **Treatment**

*“The consultant said that ultimately I might need to have a full knee replacement. However, I am not at that stage yet which a relief is because I find the idea of surgery quite frightening. Who doesn’t?*

*What I have been having are steroid injections into the knee. They cut down the swelling and really help for a bit. Straight after you have had one you feel pain free and then the effects wear off after a while. However I know I can’t keep having these forever so I’m trying to do as much as I can in other areas to help too.*

*Through physiotherapy I’ve been taught exercises to practise to strengthen the muscles surrounding my knee. And I’ve also tried to make some lifestyle choices to minimise the pain I’m in.”*

### **What I did**

*“One of the biggest shocks for me was being urged to keep moving, I’d always thought that you rest a painful joint but I was told with arthritis this could make my pain worse not better overall. I haven’t started jogging – that wouldn’t be a good idea with my knees, but I have made the following changes.”*

- **Swimming and cycling:** *“I go to my local leisure centre swimming twice a week and if I don’t go I really notice the difference. It seems to strengthen all my muscles but particularly those that support my knee. I also try and go cycling with the kids at the*



*weekend. These non-impact activities mean I can keep myself fit without putting too much strain on my knee.”*

- **Losing weight.** *“The pounds had crept on over the years and I’d just thought that was what happened after your forties. But the doctor explained that my big middle was putting my knees under extra strain which made sense. Over a year I’ve lost a stone and a half, mainly by cutting out takeaways, junk food and snacks including chocolate and crisps and reducing my beer intake. The exercise has obviously helped too.”*
- **Adjustments at work:** *“I had to talk to my line manager and occupational health about this – they were very helpful in helping me to make adjustments to my work duties so I no longer have to put pressure on my knees by kneeling for repair work. This means I’ve been able to carry on working.”*

### **Where I am now**

*“I have good days and bad days – I have learned that I have to accept that and be thankful that most of the days are good days. On the bad ‘flare up’ days I take pain killers and try and strike the right balance between keeping active and resting when I feel I’ve overdone it.*

*If I keep moving my knee does hurt less. I am amazed at how much better I feel since I’ve been doing regular exercise so I plan to stick with it.*

*I know I may need a knee replacement in the future and when that time comes that is fine but I hope I can put it off for a few years yet.”*

