

## **Don't ignore warning signs, says prostate cancer patient**

Carl Rushton ignored signs that something was wrong for three years – and it was only when he was being treated for diabetes that it was discovered he also had prostate cancer.

“At 40, I knew I was too young for prostate cancer. Along with feeling awful generally, and having no energy, my life was being dominated by frequent visits to the loo which were often painful and the flow not as good as it was,” said Carl.

It was no great shock that he wasn't feeling his usual self. He had changed job from being an active tradesman to a construction manager, was driving 1,000 miles a week and eating unhealthy meals on the go.

“I was told I'd become type 2 diabetic and needed to make some pretty drastic changes to my lifestyle.

“That was five years ago. In the meantime, I lost a lot of weight, joined a canoe club and started to run competitively for my local running club in Cheadle.

“I felt great - the diabetes was the last of my concerns. The loo situation had not improved. I was getting up in the night up to seven times to pee. The individual dribble visits were taking so long that I'd taken to sitting down and often, I'd fall asleep just sitting there.

“I lived with it, putting it down to middle age and avoided drinking when I had a car journey or meeting that I knew could go on for an hour or two,” Carl explained.

On Christmas Eve 2013, Carl received a phone call from his GP surgery to say that a routine blood test for his diabetes had shown his PSA level was high. He had no idea what that meant, so Googled it and found it stood for 'prostate specific antigen'.

More tests followed, and, Carl recalled, a urine flow test. “The consultant described my flow as 'pathetic' and asked me why on earth I'd put up with it for so long. That's the thing. It had crept up on me over years and I'd slowly adapted to living with it.”

In May 2014, Carl received the news that he had prostate cancer. He was given all of the options, as well as appointments with consultants to discuss them, in order to reach an informed decision.

“This was a time of much heartache and, I'm ashamed to say, drinking of good whisky for both myself and my wife, Andrea. She kept a note of questions we planned to ask and what the consultants said.

“Being only in my 40s, a prostatectomy was originally at the bottom of my list; it had become all too obvious though, that for me, it was the only option which gave me a good chance of survival. We were told of all the side-effects and we both decided that these were a small price to pay for a future together.

“In the meantime, we had friendship and support from many local groups and charities that were all fantastic. We made friends at the local Cheadle Cancer Support Group where we could speak candidly and safely amongst fellow cancer sufferers and carers. We also had many conversations and meetings with Macmillan and Prostate Cancer UK who gave us advice and provided a listening ear for myself and my family,” added Carl.

The operation went ahead in August 2014 and, when complications occurred, resulted in two further operations to widen his urethra and to fit a catheter.

“I’d booked to compete in a tough marathon in the Cotswolds at the end of November and it was running that kept me focused,” said Carl. “The final catheter was removed on the Thursday and I ran the marathon on the Sunday!”

Carl returned to light duties at work a few weeks later and over the course of the next six months, ran another six marathons. Now back at work full-time, his PSA levels suggest the cancer has been fully removed and he is learning to cope with the effects of the treatment.

“Life is good again, my wife and myself have never been so close and we have met some lovely people along the way. In many ways, the cancer journey for us has been very positive. It’s helped us prioritise what really is important in life. We are both looking forward to many happy years with our families and friends and training together to get back in shape to hit the race season proper in 2016,” he explained.

Now about to join the patient champions group for the Transforming Cancer and End of Life Care in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent programme, Carl is acutely aware of the importance of not ignoring what your body is telling you.

“We men often put off telling anyone when things don’t seem right. But take my advice, if something feels wrong, don’t delay in going to your GP to get checked out,” he finished.