



You never think you'll hear the words – 'you have cancer'

After being diagnosed with a rare form of cancer, Jo Green's life changed forever. She tells **Catherine Collins** how she now lives for the moment and is focusing her attentions on fundraising to help find a cure for the disease

FOR 15 years Jo Green had cancer, but she didn't know. She was a picture of health, with a career in the fitness industry and spent most of her time working-out or teaching classes, and rarely got a cold, let alone flu or a virus.

But, there was one problem that kept surfacing – Jo had been back and forth to doctors and the hospital for what she was told was IBS [Irritable Bowel Syndrome], with symptoms that would come and go, including pain, diarrhoea, tiredness and bloating.

Eventually the 37-year-old was diagnosed with multiple neuroendocrine tumours, known as NETs, a rare, incurable slow-growing form of cancer that affects the release of hormones into the bloodstream.

"Being told I had cancer was a total shock to me," she says. "For as long as I can remember I've had IBS. Looking back, I never felt like any particular 'diet' solved my problems.

"I'd been going to my GP for ten years and had been seen at the hospital for my strange flushing. My 'IBS' wasn't constant and did not seem to follow a pattern, but it steadily got worse.

"I was always reassured that there was nothing wrong with me."

Once Jo's cancer was diagnosed, the next few weeks were a blur of scans and tests to ascertain what stage the cancer was at.

"Those weeks went very slowly. I suspected that it was already advanced, given that I'd been having symptoms for years, but the rarity of my cancer meant my treatment plan was being discussed in meetings, and I had to wait to find out what options I would be offered."

FOR MORE DETAILS

Since her diagnosis, Jo and her friends have raised over £40,000 for Planets – to raise awareness and give something back to the team that looked after her so well. "I feel lucky to have been referred to such an amazing team of nurses, doctors and surgeons," she explains. "Medical science is improving all the time and I'm grateful that I've been given the time to take advantage of any developments made by my surgeon and his team." If you want to donate to PLANETS, visit: justgiving.com/Joanne-Green5.

A few weeks after her initial diagnosis, and still unsure of her situation, Jo ran the Great South Run and raised £1,000 for Macmillan. She set herself a target to run it the following year in a similar time.

Jo was referred to Southampton General Hospital and under the care of consultant surgeon, Mr Neil Pearce, she was told that she would need surgery to remove the tumour, but she would never be cured and her condition could only be managed, hopefully for decades.

"Initially I was shocked that my life was never going to return to normal, quickly followed by relief that I was still going to be here in 12 months time.

"I slept for the first time in weeks.

"The next day it dawned on me that I might not grow old."

It took eight hours for the surgeon to remove Jo's tumour, which was more extensive than scans had initially shown, and the surgery 'knocked her for six'.

"I cannot describe how it felt to enter the hospital feeling fit and well, to then wake up after surgery in a high dependency unit attached to

numerous tubes and feeling more poorly and weak than I ever have in my life!"

Despite the gruelling surgery, and what she describes as 'physically the hardest days of her life', Jo's fitness served her well and she was able to go home just nine days later.

Ten months on, Jo ran the Great South Run again – faster than the year before – and along with 18 friends raised £8,000 for Southampton based charity, Planets, which is dedicated to defeating pancreas and liver cancers and NETS.

And now, although Jo has six-monthly checks to monitor her cancer, she is determined to live day-by-day, and ensure she is fit and healthy for any future surgery she may need.

"You never think you will hear the words 'you have cancer'," she says. "And it's tough to wake up in the morning with that knowledge.

"I appreciate life and health and the people around me more than ever, and my illness has given me a different perspective on life. I still have cancer, but the reality is that I am now safer than I've been in all the years I have been suffering."



YOUR VIEWS...

Robbie Williams shocked and delighted fans last week when he, and wife, Ayda released a video documenting the arrival of their second child. Was it a stroke of genius doing such a candid film or should some occasions in life remain private? We asked the people of Southampton what they thought...



What do you think of Robbie Williams' joke videos during his wife's labour?

Name: Dave Ford
Age: 33
From: Gosport
Job: Carpenter
"I think he was trying to distract her, so I think that was OK – it is not something that I would do though."



Name: Eileen Dixon
Age: 56
From: Millbrook
Job: Driving Instructor
"As long as his wife was OK with it, and she seemed to be, I think it is fine. I wouldn't have minded in those circumstances."

Name: Kirsty Flack
Age: 45
From: Hampshire
Job: Child Care Assistant
"I think it was disgraceful. Labour is a very personal thing and I don't understand why you would parade it like that."

Name: Geraldine John
Age: 21
From: Southampton
Job: Student
"I thought it was really cringe worthy. It was like he wanted to take all the attention away from her. It should have been more private between them."



YOUR CHARITY EVENTS

Atlantis star joins host of celebrities at charity Christmas concert

HAMPSHIRE actress, Sarah Parish, will be among the celebrities at a fundraising Christmas concert.

The 46-year-old who is currently starring in BBC1's *Atlantis* will perform a reading in Winchester College Chapel for the moving event to support people fighting breast cancer.

The festive evening is organised by The Haven in Wessex who are determined to raise £1.1m to open a specialist support centre in Titchfield for anyone living with the effects of the disease – a campaign

backed by the *Daily Echo*.

It takes place from 6.30pm on December 18 and features music arranged by Richard Brett with uplifting song performances from former St Swithun's School Choristers and Rock Choir.

High profile celebrity friends and supporters of The Haven including the Alresford-based actress will perform readings.

BBC *South Today* presenter and chair of The Haven in Wessex, Sally Taylor, who has witnessed first-hand the effects

of breast cancer after undergoing surgery in 1999, says: "Last year's Christmas concert was truly magical and we expect tickets for this year's event to sell very quickly. Much has happened in the last year. We reached a major milestone when we were able to purchase our property outright in January 2014 that will be home to The Haven in Wessex.

"We now need to raise another £1.1m to complete the refurbishment and secure the first two year's running costs. The Wessex region that The

Haven will serve has nearly 3,000 new cases of breast cancer diagnosed each year so we need The Haven in Wessex to open as soon as possible – there are many people who need our help."

Tickets, which cost £40 each, are now on sale and will include hot canapés and a glass of champagne.

■ **To buy tickets email:** Heidi.rehman@thehaven.org.uk or go to: thehaven.org.uk/winchesterchristmasconcert