

## Real stories: Rob Daly

Several years ago, having just turned 61, Rob Daly from the Isle of Barra in the Western Isles followed a healthy diet and took daily exercise. He also considered he had good genes and no generic risk factors, with his mum and nan having lived into their 80s and his dad still strong and healthy in his 90s.

So, when the bowel screening test arrived through his door, he never had any concerns that there would be a problem.

Fast forward two years and Rob, a retired schoolteacher, has become a bowel cancer survivor. Rob's cancer was detected early, because he took the bowel screening test, and he is now urging others to take the test so that, if there is a problem, they too will have the best possible chance of beating the disease.

Rob explains that he had never considered that he would be at risk of having bowel cancer at all.

“About five years ago, I was shocked to discover that my weight had gone up to 16 stone 4,” says Rob. “From that moment, I set about losing weight and getting myself fit. I took up ‘brisk’ walking (about six miles a day) and followed Paul McKenna’s ‘I can make you thin’ guidance. Over the course of a year, I lost three stone, started jogging and continued to follow a healthy diet – small portions, lots of fruit and fresh veg, cutting out almost all red meat, etc. There is no history of bowel cancer in the family; my mum and nan lived into their 80s and my dad is still going at 92. I have not smoked for over 25 years – but I probably drink a bit more than I should, but I have two or three periods each year when I don’t drink at all.”

Clearly fit and seemingly healthy, Rob had previously done the bowel screening test in 2011 and so, had no reservations when the pack arrived through his door the following year.

“I thought the first time I did the test that it would be silly not to – but I never thought for a minute that I might test positive,” he admits. “I had no reservations about doing the test. I thought carefully about the easiest way of doing it. My solution was to place an aluminium tray, which was a perfect fit, in the loo. It only took a few minutes. It was much easier than messing with lots of loo roll or whatever. It was very quick, and didn’t take long enough to be unpleasant.”

Within a month after completing the test in early June 2012, Rob received a follow-up letter and kit in the post, explaining the need for a re-test.

Rob explains: “I still never thought for a minute that the reason for the positive test was anything other than some of the possibilities suggested. Within a few weeks I had a colonoscopy and came away from that thinking everything was fine, because nobody at the hospital suggested that anything was untoward. I was aware that a polyp had been removed (I watched them do it) and that it would be sent away for testing, but I left the hospital thinking I was in the clear because no one had suggested anything otherwise.”



## ***Cancer Diagnosis***

'Total shock' was how Rob described his reaction when, two weeks later, he received a phone call to say that the test on the polyp had revealed that it was cancerous.

He recalls: "I had to fly to Inverness on the Monday - the phone call came on a Friday afternoon, they wanted me to go the next day! At Raigmore Hospital, on September 10 2012, I had a CT scan and was told what would happen next. At first it was thought I would need five weeks of radiotherapy, then surgery, but the CT scan revealed that this wasn't needed. How did I react? I was in a complete daze, almost unbelieving."

Rob also pointed out that he had absolutely 'no signs or symptoms whatsoever'.

"That's why it was such a shock," he adds. "No family history; very healthy diet; jogging, by this time, four or five miles, six days a week. I was probably then, fitter than I had ever been in my adult life."

Around a month after attending Raigmore, Rob attended hospital in Glasgow, and was told he would need an ileostomy, which was scheduled for November 2012. (An ileostomy is a surgical opening constructed by bringing the end or loop of small intestine - the ileum - out onto the surface of the skin. Intestinal waste passes out of the ileostomy and is collected in an external pouching system which is adhered to the skin.)

Rob explains: "Before the surgery, I really pushed myself with exercise because I wanted to get as fit as I possibly could. The surgery had been explained to me and so I knew what was going to happen. I had no adverse reactions to the surgery – I was 'under' from 9am until 6pm, but by 7pm, I was having a sandwich, feeling great and mightily relieved! I guess the patient administered pain killer helped!"

He adds: "All went very well; I was up and about the next day and home within another three days. I understood at the time that I might have the pouch for three to six months and I just assumed that it would be six. I quickly got the hang of managing the pouch and changing it."

Rob started chemotherapy in January 2013 and he had six sessions, with the final one in May 2013.

He explains: "The news about the chemo was a complete shock. The consultant in Glasgow rang me about three weeks after the surgery and I had no idea that might happen. Nobody had mentioned chemo before that point. I also hadn't been aware of the fact that, during the surgery, 13 lymph nodes had been removed, two of which 'exhibited some cancerous cells'.

"Going to Glasgow every three weeks or so was a drag because it meant two nights and three whole days away. Fortunately Margaret [Rob's wife] was able to come with me. I was back jogging a few weeks after the surgery and I kept it up all the way through until just after the last treatment, when I was just too tired, but I kept walking. Within another month I was back at it again."

By October 31, 2013, when he saw the consultant in Glasgow for a follow-up appointment, Rob had further built up his physical fitness, and was jogging six miles, once a week; doing a fast three-miles, two days a week; and doing his usual four-mile jog the other four days! He then unfortunately suffered a calf injury.

Rob had his reversal surgery in January this year, so, in total, he had the ileostomy for around 14 months.

“By the time of the reversal ‘op’ I was back doing three miles a day, I even did five miles the day I flew out!” Rob recalls. “Through all this time, I ate normally, had a good appetite and felt absolutely fine. The only negative was that, for a few days after the chemo, I would feel a bit off colour, but I could still manage a bacon roll and a four mile run!”

### ***‘Looking forward to having a long and active life’***

Today, Rob now considers that he was lucky to have been fit and healthy when he was diagnosed, and extremely lucky that the cancer was picked up at an early stage (when it could still be effectively treated) through the bowel screening test.

“I just thought it would be silly not to take the test...even though I never thought that I might fail it. Having said that, I guess part of me must have thought, why risk it? I would urge everybody to take the test. I’m now looking forward to having a long and active life. My dad is 92 and my consultant said he sees no reason why I shouldn’t make it that far. Right now, I’m just getting back to the fitness level I was at last October. The internal plumbing needs to settle down a bit, but it isn’t going to stop me doing anything.”

Everyone between the age of 50 and 74 is being encouraged to participate in bowel screening, when they receive the bowel screening kit in the post. Those aged over 74 can also request a kit every two years.

**REMEMBER: DETECT CANCER EARLY - Nine out of 10 people will survive bowel cancer if it is detected early. Bowel screening saves lives by detecting problems early and spotting symptoms that people may not know they have. Don’t take a chance, take the test!**

Rob is pictured at a ‘Barrathon’ with his daughter, Karen.