

FINDING our FEET!

It's National Walking Month and these three TaBers are enjoying the benefits of putting their best foot forward



Catherine

Time to heal

Almost drifting off to sleep, my phone suddenly lit up beside me.

'Hello?' I answered sleepily, as I heard my sister's voice.

'I've got awful news,' she said, and I sat bolt upright as she explained.

'I'll be right there,' I replied, and immediately packed a bag. I booked the first flight to Guernsey where my sister and her family lived, and got a lift to the airport.

My niece had been found dead.

It was a huge shock and before I'd even arrived, I was grieving. But I knew I needed to be there for her.

'I'm so sorry,' I said, when I reached my sister and

wrapped her into a hug.

I stayed for a few days to support her, but due to the circumstances surrounding my niece's death, we couldn't grieve properly because we didn't know the cause.

Months passed, and I went through the motions. I barely left the house except to go to work.

One day, I felt my chest tighten.

I was about to have a panic attack and told my husband, 'I have to get outside.'

Immediately, I flung open the door and just started walking.

I didn't know where I was going, I just needed to feel the sun on my skin and fresh air in my lungs.

After that, it became the closest I could get to grieving.

I started putting sunglasses on, so I could cry as I walked around the streets or to a local green.

It was the only reason to get out of the house some days.

My favourite time of day to walk became early in the morning, just before sunrise.

I could have my own space to clear my head, and see the beauty of the early morning sky at the same time.

I started to invite friends

and family on my walks too. I found people opened up much more than if you were talking face-to-face.

Walking was there for me and got me through my toughest times.

It improved my mental health so much, I decided to get a job with Living Streets, a charity that helps promote everyday walking and safe-walking environments.

We lost my niece seven years ago now, and an inquest recently ruled there was insufficient evidence to decide how her death had occurred.

I miss her greatly and I'll always think of her, especially on my walks, when I look up at that beautiful morning sky.

From Catherine Woodhead, 53, of London

● To find out more about Living Streets and National Walking Month, visit livingstreets.org.uk



Catherine and her dog Teddy



Dipak on a walk

Little by little

Sitting in the chair at the hospital, I sighed.

I was in the middle of treatment for breast cancer, and as my chemotherapy and radiotherapy sessions progressed, they had taken their toll on me physically and sapped all my energy.

But one day, my friend Lina had a suggestion.

'I know you feel weak but why not try walking?' she suggested.

I raised an eyebrow.

'It doesn't have to be far,' she said. 'Just a few steps around the house can really help lift your spirits and get you back on your feet, little by little.'

The more I thought about it, I realised she was right.

So I started small. If I needed to go to the kitchen or toilet, I'd make sure to go the long way through the house.

Still at my weakest, I managed 200 to 1000 steps a day, until I started to feel well enough to go outside.

'We'll just go as far as you can, and the moment you

can't go any further, I'll get the car,' my sister Panna said, as we headed off.

Slowly but surely, walking not only helped me rebuild my strength, but gave me a much needed mental boost too.

'The more I move, the better I feel,' I said to Panna.

Nurses suggested that after my chemo session every three weeks, I should do something celebratory, and walks became that for me.

We ventured further out to local parks, and when I finished my treatment, I knew I had to go somewhere special to celebrate.

'I want to go on a walk to Stanage Edge in the Peak District,' I said to Panna.

It was a struggle, but we completed the 7km route.

Walking has become one of the biggest passions in my life. I recently took part in a wellbeing walk around Bradgate Park. I've also just

become a volunteer walk back-marker, where I define routes for people to navigate in the local countryside.

It'll be a great chance to not only meet other people, but to share the joys of walking.

Walking really is the best form of medicine and has changed my life for the better.

From Dipak Rao, 64, of Leicester



Dipak



Tanya on a stroll

A daily dose

I looked down at my big bump as the doctor cleared his throat.

'Tanya, you have gestational diabetes,' he said, as he flicked through my notes. 'Whenever you eat any sort of carbohydrates, your insulin spikes.'

At 28 weeks pregnant with twins, I'd started to feel unwell whenever I ate, so I'd gone to my GP.

This was my second pregnancy and, strangely, I hadn't had this issue the first time round.

But with my carb cravings, it wasn't ideal news, and I needed to get this under control.

So, I checked online to research how to combat it, and found I could just go on a walk after eating.

It made an incredible difference to my blood sugar levels, and helped me control my insulin levels without the need for injections.

'I only need a 10-minute walk and I'm fine!' I said to my partner.

A few months later, I gave birth to my beautiful twins, Kit and Lois.

When I was ready to go back out again, I took them with me.

I'd go for a stroll when my partner was at work, which was tricky with only one pair of hands. But I managed and it was like doing weight-

training too!

As I lived in a close-knit community, it didn't take long before I started to bump into other mums on my strolls.

One came up and asked, 'Do you want to join my WhatsApp group for new mums in the area?'

'I'd love to!' I replied.

Simply through walking, I managed to find a brand-new network of mums, where we all supported each other and helped with anything from feeding to getting the babies to sleep.

The twins are now 16 months old, but I still see the value in regularly walking – both physically and mentally.

Every day, I'll try and take them for a stroll. It's good to get me out of a rut, and they love looking at the planes and birds in the sky as I push them around.

My walk-a-day really did keep the diabetes away.

From Tanya Braun, 36, of Woodford Green, Gtr London



With Lois and Kit

By Danielle Lett