

'I found happiness in the hills'



She started slowly and gradually increased the distance

As I sat in the chair in the hospital waiting room, I sighed. I was having treatment for breast cancer and, as my chemotherapy and radiotherapy sessions progressed, it had taken its toll physically. I felt drained and weak.

We were also in the middle of lockdown, which only added to my sense of uncertainty.

One day, my friend Lina had a suggestion. 'I know you're not feeling great, but why not try walking?' she asked. I raised an eyebrow. But when she explained, it did make sense. 'It doesn't have to be far,' she said. 'Just start with a few steps around the house. It could lift your spirits.'

So I gave it a go and started off small. If I needed to go to the

Following treatment for cancer, Dipak Rao, 64, was determined to get back on her feet

kitchen, I'd go the long way through the house to ensure I got my steps in. I'd manage 200 to 1000 steps each day which may not sound like much, but it helped me retain a sense of independence.

Gradually I felt well enough to go outside and my sister Panna, who I lived with, was ready to help. She agreed we'd go for a walk and she'd come back and get the car if I'd had enough.

Slowly but surely, I got stronger and realised I was actually looking forward to our daily walks. They became the perfect reason to get out of bed for some fresh air, and the more I moved, the better I felt.

Nurses suggested that I should do something to celebrate after my chemo sessions – and my walks became that for me. Panna and I began venturing further out to local parks. When I finally finished my treatment, I knew I had to go somewhere special to celebrate.

'I want to go to Stanage Edge in the Peak District,' I told Panna. We'd both seen it on a YouTube video during lockdown. It was the longest ridge on the Peak District and it looked amazing, so we agreed we'd conquer it together!

It was a struggle but we managed to complete the seven mile-route in six hours and the breathtaking views of the moorlands and valleys made it all worthwhile. Afterwards I felt on top of the world.

When I told my GP how much I had been walking, he was so pleased and told me that walking has been shown to cut the risk of cancer by 50%.

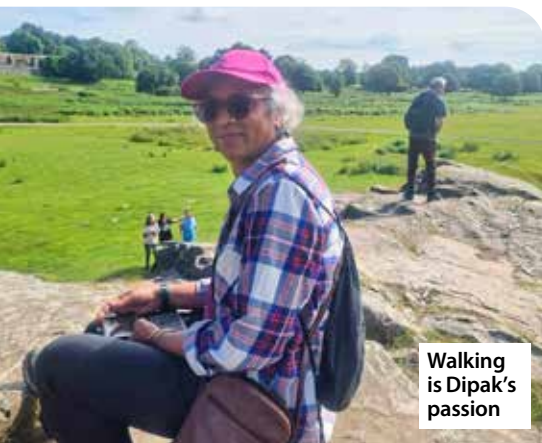
Now my cancer is in remission and walking has become one of my biggest passions in life. I walk 10,000 steps every day around my local area in Leicestershire and up to 18,000 further afield in the Peak District on weekends. To help keep it interesting, I take part in

local wellbeing walks and have made many new friends who share the joys of rambling.

I've also just become a volunteer walk back-marker. My role is to stay at the back of group walks with the slowest walkers, ensuring no one gets left behind. Hopefully I'll be able to inspire them while remembering how far I've come since those tough early days.

My life has transformed since I put my trainers on and got back on my feet. I'm more hopeful about the future and really see the beauty in everything. Walking truly is the best form of medicine, it's changed my life for the better.

'Just a few steps can lift your spirits'



Walking is Dipak's passion