

Allotment proves a life-saver for stroke survivor Jonathan



Stroke survivor Jonathan Jones' allotment has helped him rebuild his life after a severe stroke which had left him unable to walk or talk.

Jonathan, 52, says tending the plot near his home in Ouston, County Durham, has been hugely beneficial, both mentally and physically.

Jonathan's stroke – a bleed on the brain – happened 21 years ago after an incredible chain of events which started with a holiday to the Greek island of Kos.

"I was born with a heart defect, which has required surgery throughout my life," said Jonathan. "I went on a family holiday to Greece, and a business trip

to Finland, but a few weeks after I returned I started to feel unwell. I found out that I'd got bacterial endocarditis, an infection in my heart.

"I was actually in hospital being treated for the high temperature caused by the infection when I had the stroke. Part of the infection broke off and went up into my brain where there was a weakness in a vein and it haemorrhaged.

"I had to be transferred from Dryburn Hospital, in Durham to Newcastle General Hospital 17 miles away. The doctors told my wife 'If he bleeds any more on the journey he'll die'. Luckily I got to the general hospital and they scanned my head and then drained the multiple bleeds.

"My right side was affected quite badly by the stroke. I had to learn to walk and talk again. It was a long hard journey, spending months in hospital trying to get back to normal life.

"I did go back to work again but life just didn't seem the same.

"My wife Joanne, and I, considered an allotment to help me with my exercise, getting some fresh air and helping me feel better. My mood was very low. I just didn't think life was worthwhile anymore.

"We got the allotment but I was a bit negative about it because I'd never been an allotment gardener.

"We took the allotment on with our daughter Megan, who was only four or five at the time, because it was something we thought we could do as a family.

"My daughter has now grown up and my wife works long hours as a complex case manager for the NHS so it's fallen to me to do it and I absolutely love it.

"It helps my self-esteem, it helps my mood. I'm putting something on the table. I'm getting fruit and veg which would cost an arm and a leg at the moment if you were buying it from a supermarket.

"It gives me routine. I come up here and I can work all day. I do four or five hours and I look at my Fitbit and I've done loads of exercise. It's amazing the benefits it gives me.

"It also helps with my diet. It means we eat much better food which is something you need to do as a stroke survivor.

"It's about repetitive tasks and giving you something to do. There's a sense of community. Everybody helps out. We needed something doing on one of

the beds and a gentleman who owns one of the other allotments actually helped out and did it for us.

"It's a real community spirit. I feel better when I go home. I feel like I've done something for myself and any problems you have just fade away when you're on your hands and knees digging weeds out.

"I would recommend an allotment garden to anybody. We had a lot of support to do this. We got advice from Dobbies. We got advice from all the other allotment gardeners here. They come and help. They're always willing with some advice. They tell you what to grow, what not to grow, how to grow it.

"I've also been helped by other allotment gardeners to build some covers for our raised beds to help in the fight against pests.

"We've managed to plant potatoes, cabbage, beetroot, brussel sprouts, and onions so far this year. We've also got raspberry and gooseberry bushes, plus red currants and strawberries on the go, so hoping for a bumper crop.

"We've really built the allotment up, it's a wonderful thing to do!"