



DREAM CLIMB FOR MAN AFTER YEARS TRAPPED BY PAIN

Pioneering hip replacement surgery has ended a decade of pain for a Plymouth man. Health reporter HELEN PEARSE finds out about his new lease of life.

Retired Plymouth lawyer Anthony Seager couldn't believe it when he had to give up the activities he loved because of osteoarthritis.

The 70-year-old from Woolwell had always been used to physical exercise, and was a keen sailor, as well as enjoying other hobbies such as hiking and cycling.

But in the early 1990s he began to experience pain and discomfort in his hips, and in the last 10 years he has had two hip replacements

Anthony had always wanted to climb Sydney Harbour Bridge, but the crippling osteoarthritis threatened to scupper his plans.

But earlier this year, on his 70th birthday he was able to fulfil his ambition when he made the trip to the summit with wife Frances, daughter Abigail, and her fiance Thomas Elher .

He said: "I loved being active, whether I was sailing, hiking or cycling. I was very troubled when I realised my hips, the left in particular, were affecting my mobility. I found myself avoiding anything that involved walking. I was even struggling to do simple things like going to the shops."

Concerned by the effect the pain was having on his life, Anthony went to see his doctor. He underwent a series of tests and x-rays which revealed he was suffering from osteoarthritis, a disease of the cartilage in joints that causes progressive breakdown of cartilage until the bones, which were once separated by cartilage, rub against each other.

This results in damage to the tissue and underlying bone, causing painful joints.

Anthony decided to try to manage his condition through exercise and diet, though his doctor explained he would eventually need to have his left hip replaced.

Though he coped with the pain for about five years, Anthony found that it wasn't just his physical freedom being curtailed.

He said: "My mental freedom really suffered. When I wanted to do something I had to stop and think if I would be able. In the end I knew my left hip had got really bad and I needed to have it replaced, but was concerned about how long the implant would last."

In 1995, Anthony decided to visit Graham Gie, a consultant orthopaedic surgeon at the Princess Elizabeth Orthopaedic Centre in Exeter.



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He was told there had been serious deterioration in his left hip joint and that the best course of action would be to replace it. Mr Gie explained the procedure in detail and told Anthony about the prosthetic hip he would be receiving known as an 'Exeter hip implant'.

The Exeter is different from other hip implants available. It is collarless to ensure the weight is carried down the centre of the stem and the force is maintained by the whole bone; double tapered - the most appropriate shape for pushing the implant through the bone cement that is inserted into the hollowed out interior of the bone (femoral canal); cemented to keep the implant steady and the femoral head was elevated on the neck so as to allow as full a range of movement in the hip as possible.

Anthony said: "I was told that this type of hip was lasting very well - some patients from the early seventies were still walking around on the same hip 20 years on.

"After the operation I wasn't in any pain. I had spent the last five years in constant pain, day in, day out. I had got so used to it I never imagined that I would be free of it."

After just a few days in hospital, Anthony soon began to go back to his old hobbies and interests, occasionally sailing and backpacking with his wife Frances.

But a few years later he began to experience more severe pain in his right hip. Again, he altered his diet and tried to cope with the discomfort.

Later that year, Anthony returned to Mr Gie and was admitted to hospital for a total replacement of his right hip. Again, he woke up after the operation completely free from pain.

He said: "It was an absolutely total miraculous transformation. I cannot imagine my life without my new hips. Nothing stops me now. I've gone back to sailing, I regularly enjoy four or five mile walks with my wife. Since I had the second operation I've even been bush-walking."

For Anthony, the biggest achievement took place on his 70th birthday earlier this year. After years of restricted movement and crippling pain, he managed the three-and-a-half hour climb over the Sydney Harbour Bridge in Australia.

He added: "That was such an amazing experience and a fantastic way to celebrate my birthday. If I hadn't had my hips replaced I would never have managed it. They really did give me my life back."