

Health Matters

How two survivors of testicular cancer are fighting to raise awareness and why painkillers can give you a headache – all in our weekly guide to your wellbeing



“John’s cancer has brought us closer together”

John Wright, 27, works in banking and lives in Hertfordshire with his musician girlfriend Holly Rose, 25.

“I was diagnosed with testicular cancer in June 2007. I didn’t even have a lump, my GP checked that, but your body knows when something’s not right so I went back to the doctor and asked for an ultrasound scan. The scan revealed there was a tumour in my testicle. Within two days I was in hospital, having surgery to have it removed. I stayed overnight and then spent two weeks recovering at home before going back to work. The doctors said there was a 50 per cent chance of

the tumour recurring. I had the treatment options of chemotherapy or lymph node surgery, or to wait and monitor it. I nearly went for lymph node surgery but finally opted to monitor the situation closely. I was quite upbeat and felt that I’d had a lucky escape.

Almost exactly a year later my doctors discovered more cancer cells – this time in my other testicle. The chances of a new, completely unrelated case developing are really remote, and this time it was much

more of an emotional struggle. I’d just got promoted so my career was on the up and I’d settled down into a great relationship with Holly. Then I got hit with that bombshell. You wouldn’t be normal if you didn’t ask yourself questions such as, “Why me?”. But you just have to take it on the chin and soldier on.

It didn’t cross my mind that Holly would leave. She took it in her stride, looked after me and reassured me. Without our relationship I don’t think I’d have come through it as quickly as I have.

The second time I had surgery it was followed by one dose of radiotherapy. I wore a big lead apron to protect my digestive system and other organs. I had a burning sensation during the treatment and felt nauseous and tired afterwards – but the side effects are much less severe than with chemotherapy.

I am now under observation for five years and the hardest thing is waiting. It’s a lot easier if the doctors can say, “This is the issue, you’ll be sick for two months and then it will be over.” But cancer’s not like that, it’s more of a journey.

Keeping positive has definitely helped me fight my condition. If you think your life is over and wallow in self-pity then your immune system will be down. And I can draw positives out of this – I can do something to raise awareness because if you don’t bury your head in the sand and it’s caught early then it’s very treatable.

The experience has changed me – for the better. I feel stronger mentally and physically. I have matured but also have this feeling that part of my life has been taken away. That’s why I’m doing the charity bike ride, The Tropic of Cancer Challenge, in November, cycling 11,000 miles.

I want to finish the trip in Cuba on the summer solstice 2010. So that the longest day symbolises the long life that can be lived after cancer.”

To sponsor John on the Challenge, visit www.tccchallenge.co.uk.

Holly’s story:

“We’d been together three months when John phoned and said, “I need to talk to you.” That kind of call early in a relationship usually means one thing – I thought he was going to break up with me. I turned up at his and it was all very awkward. Then he just said, “I have testicular cancer.” It was a complete blow. I was 23 and knew nothing about cancer but I just said, “OK, let’s deal with it.”

It’s strange, but the first time he told me I was matter-of-fact whereas the second time was an emotional roller coaster. I was scared that he would die – that’s an ongoing thing – I still worry that I’m going to lose him to it one day.

My priorities changed. My career was doing really well – I was playing gigs at the Royal Albert Hall and singing with The Who – but I put work on hold until John was better.

He is an amazing guy and so positive. Obviously, he had his low times, and although there were ups and downs I never thought it would break us up. John is just right for me – he fits my jigsaw puzzle. Actually, his illness has brought us closer together. We moved in together the week he started his radiotherapy. I couldn’t imagine my life without him and I hope he feels the same.

When John was first diagnosed he said that if he couldn’t ever look his own child in the eye, that would kill him. But men with testicular cancer are offered the opportunity of sperm banking in case their treatment affects their fertility, which is fantastic.

Men can be embarrassed to go to their GP so I think girlfriends can play a very big part in making them aware and encouraging them to get help if necessary. After all, having an awkward conversation has got to be easier than going to a funeral.”

Holly’s single Down To One Kiss is out tomorrow on Whisky Records. Her album Vulnerable To Touch is out on September 7. Visit www.hollyrosemusic.com.