

## ME AND MY HEALTH

# When I saw my X-rays, they were horrendous

– worse than any animal's I'd ever seen!

Gill Goode, 37, lives in Rochester with partner Tim and girls, Melanie, seven, and Jasmine, five.

**As a vet, Gill was on her feet all day – but standing up was sheer agony for her...**

**A**t school, I was a bit of a swot and not into sports, because I'd always wanted to be a vet. That's probably why I didn't notice I had a problem with my hip.

It was only when I was 22 and at Bristol University that things started to go wrong. I'd gone home to see my parents and we went for a long walk. That night, I was in agony: it felt as if someone was plunging daggers into my left hip.

When I got back to Bristol, my doctor sent me to the Royal Infirmary. When I saw the X-rays they were horrendous! Instead of any recognisable hip joint, there was a lot of new bone – which is the body's reaction to unstable joints. There were cysts in the bone in my pelvis and hip. It was worse than any animal X-ray I'd seen!

The diagnosis was Perthes' disease. This affects young people as their bones grow. The blood supply to the top of the femur isn't sufficient, the femur

crumbles, the joint becomes misshapen and arthritis sets in. Most Perthes' sufferers seem to have symptoms at around 12 years old, but as I wasn't athletic, mine didn't show until later, and then it was a bit late to be able to do much to stabilise it. The doctors decided a salvage operation was too drastic, so I was given a built-up shoe instead, as my left leg was an inch shorter than my right.

Over the next few years, the pain set in, but I managed with the built-up shoe and painkillers. By this time, I'd qualified as a vet. The days were very long and there was a great deal of standing up and a lot of lifting – some of the dogs were very heavy! I sat down whenever I got a chance and I'm sure people thought I was lazy. I started to get quite depressed.

Arthritis means chronic, and occasionally agonising pain. I don't think I coped very well, but I did get out a bit and even joined a choir, where I met my future partner, Tim, who was a great support.

Eventually, I was referred to a consultant orthopaedic surgeon at the Medway Hospital, Mr Rand, who recommended a hip replacement. Most are put in with cement, which cracks after a time and needs replacing, but he told me about a new replacement called the Furlong hip. The metal hip is coated in calcium hydroxy-apatite acid and your bone grows into this coating and stops it loosening.

I had the op in May 1994 when

I was 27. It was complicated, as the surgeons had to re-use parts of my femur to make my pelvis a suitable shape for the socket implant. They had to use such force to put the implant in that they accidentally broke my femur.

I was in hospital for two and a half weeks and my fellow patients were 85, 95 and 105! I was off my feet for six more weeks and went back to work that September. The first few days were awful. Tim massaged my leg muscles every night, which helped. The actual hip wasn't the problem, it was building up my muscles which

had withered during years of limping and the enforced recuperation period.

Mr Rand said he couldn't make any promises, but thought my new hip should last at least ten years. Well, I'm ten years on now and, this March, I had it checked out and it's fine – despite the fact that I've had two children since the op.

My hip replacement is great. I work full-time and we keep active as a family, cycling and taking long walks. Mr Rand not only gave me the hope of living a normal, active life and having a family – he turned that hope into reality.

## What is a Furlong hip?

The Furlong hip is named after Ronald Furlong, the former Head of Orthopaedics at St Thomas' Hospital, who developed it. This replacement differs from traditional implants due to the special (hydroxy-apatite ceramic) coating, which enables the patient's bone to bond with the artificial material, creating a strong, flexible joint. The latest clinical studies are showing that the implant is lasting for more than 15 years without replacement.

Because the hip replacement is long-lasting, the Furlong hip can be used for younger, more active patients who wouldn't previously have been offered a traditional implant because of the increased likelihood it would become loose and need replacing. A second hip-replacement op is more complex than the original and is likely to last even less time than the first. In the event of two failed hip replacements, the patient may need to consider a wheelchair as a long-term mobility solution.

The Furlong H-A.C is available nationwide in many NHS and private hospitals, as well as abroad. The only people unsuitable for Furlong hips are children, as replacements are incompatible with bones that are still growing.

For info, call 020 7487 4477, or visit [www.hipforlife.co.uk](http://www.hipforlife.co.uk).

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