



Me



Mountain-biking



Morocco



### Matthew Moulding United Kingdom

My name is Matthew, I am 37 years old and from the United Kingdom.

I am married and currently live and work in Switzerland as an IT consultant. I heard about the Stene Prize from my mother, who saw it promoted on the Arthritis Care UK web site. I had been considering writing about my experiences and sharing them with others with my condition, and this opportunity galvanised me into doing just that.

## How exercise improves my life with a rheumatic disease

**Exercise had always been an important part of my life. At 18 years old I was a professional footballer and at 35 I was still going strong, mountain-biking 2,000km down the length of Great Britain.**

But in the space of four months, after I had finished my epic cycle ride and returned to my desk-bound IT work, my undiagnosed condition of nearly two years went into overdrive and reduced me to a shell of the man I was before. I endured sleepless nights of excruciating pain, followed by days of yet more suffering, culminating with anxiety about the tortuous nights that lay ahead. Within a year of being diagnosed I was making my wife, my brother and a good friend redundant and closing my company that I had spent 10 years building up, as well as delaying starting a family because of the medication I was taking and my lack of income.

It felt like my whole world was falling apart, not just my body.

But one year on and two years since my diagnosis, I'm free from pain-killers, cycling up Swiss

mountains, working out daily, and looking to get back into the same level of work I did before.

Exercise does not just help improve my life; it has helped me reclaim my future.

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My name is Matthew Moulding, I'm 37 years old and in December 2008 I was diagnosed with Psoriatic Arthritis - asymmetrical polyarthritis affecting me from head to toe; in my feet, hips, groin, back, neck, jaw, hands and, coming along for the ride, some very strong fatigue.

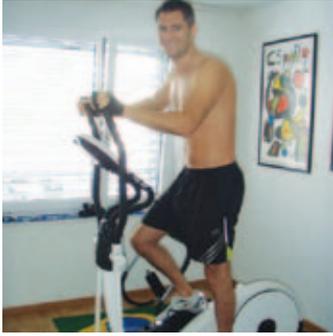
According to the Kübler-Ross model there are five stages of grief; denial, anger; bargaining, depression and acceptance. If applied to my situation, I spent most of the first 18 months bouncing between denial and anger, only very briefly dipping into bargaining. As far as I was concerned, acceptance was

simply not an option, but mentally and emotionally this created a heavy load for me to carry around.

During a routine appointment to see one of my doctors in October 2009, he asked, “How are you coping with not feeling indestructible anymore?” As I tried to answer, “Not very well...,” I simply burst into tears as the reality of openly admitting it overwhelmed me.

But physically I reflect back on my stubborn refusal to look acceptance in the eye as a key factor in my rehabilitation. I recognised very early on that my pain and discomfort were always worse after inactivity, especially first thing in the morning after a night in bed. Clearly I had to go to bed at some stage, but I resolved to do all I could during the day to help myself.

In the very beginning, ‘exercise’ just meant trying to get some dexterity into my hands and normally this first routine of the day was performed under the hot water of the shower. This progressed to a weekly Monday morning visit to the local hydrotherapy pool, in which I would do some more extensive stretching with the water taking all the strain from my joints, and after a few months I would often go for a cycle round the village



On the cross-trainer



Exercising in the pool

at lunchtime. By the time the summer came I was able to do some good length off-road rides, albeit thanks to co-codamol, which I was still taking regularly to take the edge off my pain. During this time I also started to do strength training with some free weights at home, and although there was often considerable discomfort and increased pain at the outset, once I got through that I could sense the improvement.

After exercising, my range of movement was always better. Although, for what seemed an eternity, I would wake up each morning back in the same situation and have to start all over again to get mobile. But I knew that if I could motivate myself to exercise, my day would be better for it.

Each session was a victory for me and a defeat for arthritis.

Choice of exercise was crucial and I learned quickly what forms of exercise were beneficial (low impact ones like cycling, swimming and using a cross-trainer) and those that would actually make things worse. Running has been out of the question from the very beginning and still is, even though I did try during a particularly belligerent few days of denial and anger. It's bad enough for the joints of a

healthy person, let alone someone with an inflammatory condition!

**"Each session was a victory for me and a defeat for arthritis."**

I still take the opportunity to swim whenever I can, even though I've never liked it as a sporting activity. I've found the best uses of the sea or swimming pools are for doing stretches or cooling off after exercising. As with all forms of exercise, what one does before and after can be just as important. My favoured routine is to get my joints mobile through exercise, then reduce any inflammation with cold water before warming up my body again with a hot shower. Having a hot bath just makes things worse. With arthritis, what you don't do is just as significant as what you do.

A further benefit of exercise is to keep me generally fit and healthy so that since I started taking a biologic agent, and was exposed to the increased chances of

infection, I have remained defiantly resistant, thus helping me to continue my recovery.

Exercise is not the only reason for my recovery, but it has played a vital role and continues to do so in the ongoing management of my condition. The battle is won, but the conflict continues. Arthritis does not rest, so neither can I.

I started by saying that exercise had always been an important part of my life. It was. And still is. Hopefully it will be for a long time to come.

*"It's about how hard you can get hit and keep moving forward. How much you can take and keep moving forward. That's how winning is done!"*

**Rocky Balboa, 2006**

**"The battle is won, but the conflict continues. Arthritis does not rest, so neither can I."**