

Your Health

● Real-life stories ● Latest health news ● Expert advice

Don't fill me with POISON

With chemo round the corner, Janet sent an e-mail that would change everything...



I know I've made the right decision

JANET HARMER, 43,
Lydd, Kent



The cancer had spread

Rubbing myself in body lotion, I felt a lump in my breast. *I'm only 41 – it can't be serious,* I told myself.

When a biopsy confirmed it was malignant, I tried to reassure my partner David.

'Cancer's not a death sentence any more,' I said.

But David was baffled when I told him my plan for treatment. I wanted the whole breast removed, not just the lump. And I didn't want a reconstruction. To me, this seemed the fastest way I could be cancer-free and back to normal.

I was healthy and fit and cycled 36 miles a day to and from my telesales job in Ashford, Kent. I hated the idea of spending any more time than necessary in hospital.

Sure enough, I was back home 24 hours after my operation. A week later I was on my bike again, cycling 10 miles.

I was stubbornly sure I'd beaten the disease – until my oncologist broke the news it had spread to a lymph node.

For the first time, I entertained

the darkest thought. *Maybe I am going to die, after all.*

I'd never smoked or drunk, never used the Pill or been overweight. I'd done nothing to increase my risk, but I'd developed breast cancer anyway.

Now my oncologist wanted me to have the lymph node removed, followed by chemotherapy.

As she listed the drugs I'd need to cope with the side-effects, I almost walked out. It sounded horrendous – like pouring poison into my body. I'd never even taken painkillers! The thought of being bedridden and sick filled me with horror.

I had the op to remove the cancerous lymph node, which went well. But a week before I was due to start the chemo, I e-mailed the cancer nurse saying I didn't want to go ahead.

I was expecting a big fuss and was ready to put up a fight. But there was none of that. Everyone

accepted my decision – even David.

I figured that since I hadn't wanted chemotherapy to wreck my life, I needed to make sure I enjoyed it to the full. So I decided to work only three days a week and spend the rest of my time doing things I loved – being with David and our puppy Buddy, and walking on the marshlands near our home in Lydd.

Choosing not to get sick with chemo also meant I could carry on cycling, and six months later I did a celebratory 40k Cyclettea – a women-only ride, raising funds for Macmillan Cancer Support.

If I'd had the chemo, I'm sure I wouldn't have been fit enough to do that.

Whatever the future holds now, I know the decision I've made is right for me.

● For more info, go to macmillan.org.uk/movemore.



I wanted to stay active

WHAT'S THE NEWS?

Your weekly update

Water on the brain

Students who take water into exams achieve better grades. Experts who conducted a study of 400 college-goers say hydration improves thinking ability and helps students stay calm.



Bye-bye baldness?

Boffins may have found a cure for baldness. When they transplanted hair follicles derived from healthy human stem cells into the skin of hairless mice, not only did hair grow normally, but when it fell out it was replaced by new hair.



Kidney clue

The mystery of why some people are more prone to kidney stones is close to being solved. Doctors have identified a gene that increases the risk of developing this painful condition by 65 per cent.

Health editor: Emma Fabian. Main story: Karen Evmenet. What's The News?: Viki Wilson. Photos: Namy

DID YOU KNOW? Eating garlic doesn't just make our breath smell, but our skin too. The sulphur in the bulb is secreted through our pores. But the good news is, other garlic eaters can't smell it!



TURN OVER FOR MORE HEALTH



that's life!