



Cycling with cystic fibrosis

MATT JOHNSON WAS diagnosed with cystic fibrosis as a baby. He tells *CW* why he started cycling long distance events

Sarah Briggs

Imagine if every morning you had to do physiotherapy to clear your lungs of mucus and then take several different antibiotics, digestive enzymes (Creons) and vitamin supplements, as well as having breakfast and getting dressed. You have a detailed daily list of medications and treatments; not just once a day but, with some modifications, several times throughout the day.

Once in a while you may get infections which need additional treatment, such as intravenous antibiotics. On a regular basis you will have hospital appointments to fit in as well.

For Matt Johnson this is his routine. Like his older brother Tim, he was diagnosed with cystic fibrosis as a baby. As a child he would lie head down on a sloping bed twice a day, so his parents could help get the mucus out of his system. Nowadays, he has active breathing exercises which help bring up the mucus without the damaging, and energy-sapping, effects of coughing.

Johnson's parents encouraged him to be active. As he got older he cycled everywhere and, growing up in Rickmansworth, nearly anywhere he wanted to go involved cycling up a hill. Cycling became part of his life for trips to school, work, the supermarket — but he hadn't really considered doing any long-distance events.

Then, about three years ago, Johnson invested in an exercise bike and started doing a daily 30-minute session on it, partly to help his condition. As he got fitter he increased the difficulty level on the bike. He decided, as so many people do who train regularly, to look for a formal goal: a recognised event which he could get sponsored for, and thereby raise money for the Cystic Fibrosis Trust.

He entered the London to Paris bike ride. Several months before, he worked out a programme to increase his stamina and mileage, until he was doing a 36-mile training ride twice a day, sometimes two days in a row. Having successfully completed the event and raised over £3,000 for the CF Trust, this year he aims to complete the Coast to Coast, and a longer-term goal is to do Land's End to John o' Groats. "Now I've reached that standard," Johnson says, "I'd really like to do one event like this every year."

Determined

Many of us with no health disadvantages would struggle

to do these events, but the determined Johnson says, "I want to push myself physically both for medical reasons and for that sense of achievement. With my history of cycling I realised that this could be something I could really push myself at."

With a condition like cystic fibrosis, training for a staged long-distance event is not something to undertake lightly. Johnson's mutation of the CF-causing gene means that his digestive problems tend to be worse than his lung problems, and two years ago he was

Fundraise

"The Cystic Fibrosis Trust would like to thank Matt for his fundraising efforts. Without people like him we would be unable to invest in cutting-edge research to develop better treatments and, ultimately, find a cure for this life-shortening disease."

Jennifer Westmoreland, head of the Cystic Fibrosis Trust's community and fundraising events



Matt Johnson: goal-setter

