



Walking *back to* happiness

One woman's long march
back to good health is
described by Sarah Briggs

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN COCKS

There was a time when Edwina Rickards Collinson could hardly be described as a picture of good health. She suffered terrible asthma attacks and in later life she put on five stone and needed hip replacement operations. Today, she is a new woman, full of positivity and vigour thanks to Nordic walking.

Edwina, who lives in Capernwray near Carnforth, moved to London when she was 18 and started a career in catering, eventually working as the chef in charge of five dining rooms at a firm of booming merchant bankers.

'I loved my job,' Edwina says. 'It was a very special time.' But she developed a lifestyle which involved little exercise and she had to be whisked into hospital several times, once on a sledge in snow-bound Scotland, due to asthma attacks.

She moved to Lancashire to be with her new husband and stopped working. That led to her doing even less exercise but her passion for cooking and good food was undiminished and she put on five stone.

Little did she realise the impact it was having on her body until her hips started aching in her mid-30s. It transpired she had had a rare reaction to all the steroids she had taken to combat asthma.

Aged just 40, her 'Millenium project', as she calls it, was a new hip joint. It could have become an excuse

to do even less activity - she was overweight, recovering from surgery and nervous about putting any physical strain on her body. Just as she was wondering what to do about it when she saw a notice for Nordic walking sessions which were starting on Morecambe Prom.

Salvation came in the form local fitness guru Sally Wilkinson, who says: 'I will always remember Edwina turning up in what looked like a pair of floral pyjama bottoms, smiling and looking so eager to please. We still laugh that by the end of the session I wondered whether I might need to call an ambulance, she pushed herself so hard. I have never witnessed anyone turn so pink and who huffed and puffed so much.

'I knew instantly that she was ready to change and Nordic walking was going to be her way of doing it. Her progress was rapid - she came to all my walks, three or four a week. I couldn't get rid of her! She always radiated a positive attitude but initially she had very little confidence in herself or her fitness levels. I could see as her body shape began to change and how much more self-assured she was becoming. Now she has inspired many of my other walkers.'

In fact, soon after discovering Nordic Walking six years ago she became an accredited leader and is now about to train as an instructor.

Recovering from surgery following replacement of her second hip in >