"I RAN MYSELF OUT OF OBESITY"

DAN WATKINS, 32

The first time I began to think about running was in 2006. I was admitted to hospital with chest pains, and the paramedic said to me: "You're in your early 30s and you have a suspected heart attack. Things have got to change." Less than a year before I had been diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes caused by my poor diet and sedentary lifestyle – and I was faced with having to take tablets for the rest of my life. I was 30 years old and weighed 24 stone.

One morning it came to me in a flash: "What are you doing to yourself? You've got to do something." It was as if someone flicked a switch in my head.

I gave myself a fresh start. I left a relationship that I wasn't happy in, moved to Norwich and joined a local gym. Even the first meal in my new flat was a healthy one.

Being so overweight at the time, I had to ease myself into an exercise programme. I just couldn't run at that stage. I started off by walking 10 minutes at a time on the treadmill. As I lost more weight, I was able to increase my speed, until eventually I was running for a minute at a time.

By December 2007, I had lost six stone. But I was just aimlessly running on the treadmill. I needed a goal to motivate me. I entered the Breckland 10K on May 4, and started a 10K training programme.

It was four weeks before that I was able to run non-stop for half an hour. My first ever run outside was the Sport Relief 5K in March. I finished in under 30 minutes, and running became real for me. I wanted to finish the 10K in 60 minutes, and this was a significant stepping-stone towards achieving that goal.

I was terrified in the weeks leading up to the race, worried that I would come in last or make myself look stupid. I turned up alone on the day, and was really nervous. I felt like a rabbit in headlights. But I thought to myself: "You're here now, you've got to do it." I positioned myself near the back of the 300 runners.

I started slowly. The last thing that I wanted to do was have to walk or not be able to finish. I latched on to a couple of runners for the first half, but decided to go for it once I'd reached the 5km mark.

It was an out and back course, so the front-runners were coming back past us. They were shouting words of encouragement, and the marshals were too. Then I saw the finish line. I suddenly realised that I was going to finish and

"IF IT WERE POSSIBLE TO HAVE BEEN CURED OF DIABETES, THEN THE RUNNING HAS CURED IT"

achieve my goal. I ran as fast as I could for that last 500m.

I'm not an emotional person. But there was something about crossing that finish line that set me off. I felt a euphoric wave of emotion and just thought, "You've done it!" There are runners and there are non-runners – I went from being one to being the other as I crossed that line.

It took me two years to be able to run properly. But I've broken the shackles of the treadmill, and love running outside. I'm also thinking of joining a running club.

The last time I saw my doctor, he said that if it were possible to have been cured of diabetes, then the running has cured it. It will never go away, but it doesn't need to be managed by medicine anymore.

My first 10K was a milestone in my life: I'm a lot happier; I'm a positive person; and my family and friends say that I'm a much nicer person to be around, too. RW