

# Running a marathon

Diagnosed at age 28 with Type 2 diabetes, Raj Kemparaju moved to Ireland in his 30s and started running, writes **Deborah Condon**

Raj Kemparaju was 28 years old when he was diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes and over the next few years, he saw his medication dosages continually increasing. However, a change in lifestyle in recent years has made a huge difference to his diabetes management.

Raj moved from India to Ireland seven years ago and currently lives in Tuam, Co Galway. Now aged 40, his diabetes was originally detected when he was 28 and still living in India.

"I was changing jobs and I had to have a health check for the new job, which included a blood test and this picked up the diabetes. Looking back, it was a good thing that I had that test as otherwise, it might have been missed for some time," he explains.

His mother also had Type 2 diabetes so he says he did think he would develop it at some stage, however he admits he was shocked to develop it at just 28.

He says that initially, he worked on changing his diet and was put on diabetes medication. However, after his wife suffered a miscarriage, he says he was "in a bad place emotionally".

"I started eating a lot again and was back to square one. I went back to the doctors and my medication was increased," he recalls.

In 2016, he moved to Ireland and noticed that men of his age "seemed to be much more young and energetic". He decided to try to live a healthier lifestyle



*Raj Kemparaju after finishing his Dublin marathon on the October Bank Holiday in 2022: "The finishing line was so good to see!"*

again, incorporating a healthier diet and more exercise.

He had been taking two tablets a day, but eventually, they were reduced and then stopped altogether. His body mass index went from 27 (overweight) to 23/24 (healthy weight).

One of the things that helped him was running, which he points out was "absolutely new for me".

"I had tried yoga but it wasn't for me. I started walking which led to running. There were many days when I felt I wasn't doing well with the running, but I slowly progressed. I discussed it with my Irish friends and they really motivated me to keep going.

"The hardest part of running is putting on your trainers. It can also be hard if you look out the window and it's raining. But even though some people say it always rains in Ireland, there is always a part of the day when it doesn't rain and that time is for the runners. Most mornings here, it is beautiful," he notes.

When he was able to run 10km, he

decided to look for a bigger challenge, such as a marathon. He contacted Diabetes Ireland which was looking for people to run the Dublin Marathon on behalf of the charity.

"I didn't know if I'd be able to do it or not. I ran a half-marathon near my home and that gave me some confidence but that was still only 50% of what I had to do. Then I ran the Galway half-marathon, so I was slowly building up my confidence. I was also doing strength training and concentrating on my diet," he recalls.

The big day arrived on October 30, 2022.

"The finishing line was so good to see and there was so much going through my mind when I crossed it. I did the marathon in just over six hours and 20 mins and I was happy with that," he says.

His wife and two children, aged seven and 10, were "really proud" of him and he has already signed up for the 2023 Dublin Marathon!

Raj acknowledges that when he was initially diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes, he tended to concentrate on one thing at a time, whether that was diet or exercise or mental health. However, he believes that you need to focus on all of these things.

"This is not a short-term solution, it is a lifelong solution. We have to learn how to enjoy the process, so find something you like to do. My journey to completing the marathon has made me feel like a new man with lots of energy. However, it is important to say that sometimes diabetes will push back and you can feel like you are going one step forward and two steps back, but this is just all part of the process," he adds.