

## **My personal challenge - the Great Ocean Walk - 7 days 106km**

### **Hiking is possible if you are well prepared!**

In October 2017 my partner and I hiked the Great Ocean Walk.

This 106km walk started at Shelley Beach near Apollo Bay and ended at the 12 Apostles (well there used to be 12)! The track follows a wild and windy coastline through the Great Otway National Park.

It was a well-marked track, which took us through rainforests, gums trees, tall eucalypts and gullies. Leeches, wind and rain aside we couldn't get enough of the breathtaking views of Bass Strait from cliff tops. We had a couple of opportunities to walk on isolated beaches when the tide was out and we were never disappointed with the changing environment of escarpments, heath land and wild flowers.

In my pre Meniere's life, hiking was an activity I did regularly. In the earlier days of my Meniere's, I realised the one activity I could manage was walking. However, it took some time for me to get my confidence to a point where I wanted to try hiking again. It then became an obsession, as I wanted some of my old life back. I needed this personal challenge. So I decided to choose a walk I have always wanted to do and I am so happy I did.

My main issue was "What will I do if I am out in the bush and something happens?" This led me to consider what was important - fitness, medication, support and food.

With the help of Google I found a company that solved my problems. The company transported our luggage along the way. All we had to carry was a daypack, taking necessary protection against the elements, water and lunch. We walked in one direction to the pre-booked accommodation. If accommodation was not near the track, someone would meet us and drive us there.

They briefed us on arrival providing us with maps, detailed description of the walk, a phone with Telstra connection and an emergency beacon. This security was the deciding factor for me to go ahead with this challenge.

Fitness was not my main concern. I had read somewhere that walking on sand is great for balance so some of my training prior to the walk was beach walking when I could on weekends and early morning walks in my neighbourhood.

As you could not buy food along the way, the biggest challenge for me was what will we eat and how will we manage it. There was an option of having food supplied for us by the company. However, as I'm following a strict low salt diet, we decided to take our own food.

It took some time to plan but I managed to organise seven breakfasts, lunches and dinners in individual packs. For breakfast we ate fruit and muesli with long

life milk. Lunches and dinners with sandwiches (low salt bread) with low salt tuna or eggs, nut mixes, apples. Dinners were very simple with pasta, lentils or rice with vegetables and homemade biscuits. This is not gourmet dining but we were happy.

#### **ADVICE WHEN HIKING:**

- Train – walk as often as you can, walking on sand is great balance training
- I always carry stocks for tricky terrain, for ease in walking and importantly for those “I am going to lose my balance” moments.
- Listen to your body - If you feel light headed, stop and rest immediately for as long as you need.
- Water and a snack can do wonders
- I don't hike alone
- Have phone connection. I try not to be too far from help, if needed.
- Carry medication, food and water
- Carry your phone
- Tell someone where you are going
- I bought an emergency beacon for isolated hikes

Whatever holiday or exercise you choose, whether you fly, sail or walk, my only advice is *be prepared*.

I believe if you are prepared it eliminates the stress of the “*what if*” moments we live with on a daily basis.

As we all know, we need to manage our stress!