

# It's shaken off my post-footy blues

**SUE DUNLEVY**

ON the field, Carlton star Andrew Walker was taking stupendous marks and kicking scores of goals.

But at home, he couldn't walk from his bedroom to the kitchen without leaning on the wall for support.

Fans were amazed at the hanging mark he took over Essendon's Jake Carlisle at the MCG in 2011. But little did they know that when the star went to the park with his three kids, he couldn't run or chase the ball.

"I was in so much pain all I could manage was to sit on a park bench and throw the ball," he says.

But now, thanks to an experimental treatment for arthritis, he's back on the football field, running at the park with his kids and lifting big weights with his legs at the gym.

Walker had knee surgery at the age of 17 after he chipped a bone in his left knee, and 10 years of punishment on AFL fields had left him in agony.

The star indigenous player had worn away a 50 cent sized spot on his left knee, had severe osteoarthritis and bone grated on bone every time he moved.

"I was in 10 out of 10 pain daily," says the man who scored 56 goals for the Blues in 2011.

The 30-year-old says he was a mess every time he came off the field and he had to spend the entire week recovering mentally and physically.

"In football your body is your tool. I kept the

pain personal but I was stressing about what the future held for me physically," he told the *Sunday Herald Sun*.

Walker tried everything to relieve the pain. He had five different

surgeries, he had the cartilage in his knee cleaned out and he even tried stem-cell therapy.

"Nothing was working — then along came pentosan," he said.

Carlton's doctor Phil Bloom teamed up with Paradigm Biopharma to test pentosan polysulfate sodium on Walker in mid-2015, after the treatment was ticked off by the AFL and the World Anti-Doping Agency.

Before the treatment, Walker's knee was so bad he was having up to 150ml of fluid drained from it up to three times a week.

"With pentosan on board and a full rehab and recovery program, it completely changed my life," he says.

The fluid causing his knee pain started to disappear and the joint has not required draining for a year.

His pain levels have gone from a "9 to 10" to just "2 to 3", and he's playing for Division 1 team West Preston Lakeside and running 13km every game.

"I'm active in the gym doing leg weights, I can walk around the block, take the dog for a walk to get coffee and I'm running around with the kids playing football and basketball," he says. "I'm shocked at the amount of activity that I've got back."

If the treatment becomes readily available, Walker

believes it could extend a player's career at elite football by up to three years.

Walker says he kept playing through the enormous pain because, as Carlton's first indigenous player, he wanted to reach his personal goal of playing 200 games.

"We do crazy things to do the things we love," he says.