



MEET TERESA



At the age of 22, Teresa, from Alabama, sustained a knee injury while playing volleyball. She was a member of the US Junior Olympic Volleyball Team and a student at the University of Tennessee. That one sports injury would impact much of her adult life and later her three children.

After college, Teresa joined the Army and trained as a combat medic. She was preparing to deploy to Kuwait to serve in Desert Storm but was unable to do so because her knee injury flared up, and she was declared non-deployable and ended up providing support stateside. After eight years of active duty, she joined the Army Reserves and began to pursue her nursing degree.

Now 57 years old, Teresa suffers from arthritis and has lived with joint discomfort since she was 24. At first, Teresa's treatment consisted of arthritis and pain medications. As a nurse, she knew there was more she should be doing to take care of herself, but Teresa was busy working long shifts—sometimes 12 to 16 hours—all while raising three boys as a single mother.

In 2011, she had to quit her nursing job to have three joint replacement surgeries in the course of one year. The procedures, each done separately, removed the damaged joints in both her shoulder and her left hip, and replaced them with artificial ones made from metal components. Because Teresa underwent three surgeries rather close together, she was at a higher risk

of developing complications. As a result, Teresa suffered a pulmonary embolism, a condition in which one of the arteries in her lungs was blocked by a blood clot. She was hospitalized and fortunately, was successfully treated for the condition.

Over the past two years, Teresa has focused more on self-care and adopted a new lifestyle that takes a more nutritional approach to her disease rather than simply a medicinal one. She avoids eating inflammatory foods like soy and wheat, incorporates more fruits and vegetables into her diet, and drinks plenty of water. As a result, she lost 50 pounds and went from taking nine pain pills a day to just two pain pills per day, due in part to the extra weight she lost. Teresa is careful to control the amount of pain medication she takes so as not to become part of the veteran opioid overdose statistics. She still takes a prescription arthritis medication and has been experimenting with things like turmeric and other natural products.

Teresa's healthier lifestyle choices are also motivated by another very important aspect of her life, her three children. Because she became a mother in her late thirties, she has a vested interest in remaining mobile to keep up with her active boys. Since her children are in their late teens and early twenties, she will soon live alone once the last one goes off to college, and Teresa wants to remain independent and self-sufficient.



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Having been an athlete, a member of the Army, and in top physical shape, Teresa feels that arthritis stole some of her identity. Through her experience living with the disease, she has learned a lot about arthritis and says you must be in control of your health. Her advice to others is to move even though it hurts. Walk a quarter mile even if it is painful because the quarter mile back won't be so bad and don't just sit down somewhere, otherwise you'll freeze up like the Tin Man from the Wizard of Oz.

After watching their mother struggle with arthritis for many years, Teresa's three children, ages 15, 20, and 22, have decided not to play any sports for fear of sustaining an injury that could lead to other problems later in life. All three are computer gamers instead so Teresa jokes that if they suffer from any disease, it will be carpal tunnel syndrome. While all three boys have taken the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery and scored quite well, none of them wants to join the Army given their mother's injury and journey with arthritis. The youngest son does enjoy running and weightlifting and the older two have joined their mother in improving their eating habits and losing excess weight.

Over the next year, Teresa faces at least two more joint replacement surgeries, which will bring her to a total of five. Teresa's advice to someone newly diagnosed with any form of arthritis is to focus on the building blocks of what your body needs to stay healthy. Learn to manage your weight and be conscious of what you eat by keeping a food journal. She also advises that those habits we have control over, like stretching and staying hydrated, can have the most benefit. Teresa admits that

had she practiced these healthy habits in her twenties, she would be much better off than she is now.

In addition to lifestyle habits, Teresa would recommend that if there's a history of arthritis in your family or if you have ever sustained a joint injury, you need to educate yourself about symptoms to watch for like pain, stiffness, and swelling. Because everyone has a chance of developing arthritis, even if they do not have a family history of the disease, Teresa hopes that others will take proactive steps to address it and that researchers will discover other treatments that do not involve addictive pain medicines.