

Megan Johnston
Arthritis Bio

Nine years ago I started to notice some unfamiliar aches and pains throughout my body. My wrists were pulsing with pain, fingers locked in a claw, knees were red and swollen, and every step felt like walking barefoot on rocks. I chalked it up to growing pains and the extra training at cross country practice, thinking that in time my body would adjust and these pains would simply go away. But they didn't. Soon I was skipping breakfast because I couldn't get any food packages open. I asked my friend to zip and button my pants in the morning before we walked to the bus stop together. I asked a classmate to write for me because holding a pencil was almost impossible. In gym class, my teacher scolded me for the lack of effort and demanded an attitude adjustment. Cross country practice was a burden because new pains appeared: a sharp stab in the shoulder with every arm swing, and a piercing pain in the ankles with every footfall. Every evening I went home exhausted. I mentioned my problems to a few friends, but nothing to my parents. I kept telling myself "I am 13, I am too young to have anything wrong with me."

About one year into hiding my increasingly worsening aches and pains from my parents, something happened that would change my life for the better. I was in the kitchen trying to open and close my hands but struggled. My mom happened to be standing right behind me. She witnessed my difficulties. After some quick doctor visits and a follow-up appointment, I was diagnosed with JRA by a pediatric rheumatologist.

The last eight years since my diagnoses have been filled with ups and downs — thankfully the ups by far outnumber the downs! I have been able to keep doing the things I want to do without feeling limited by my arthritis. And that is the ultimate goal, right? To just be me.