



Hello. My name is Jean McDonald, and I have been chosen as the 2012 Honoree for the Arthritis Foundation's Jingle Bell Run/Walk. I was so honored when I received the call from the Arthritis Foundation asking me to represent all those in the St. Louis area living with arthritis.

I was diagnosed with Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) at age 38. A year earlier, I had noticed severe pain in my feet. An avid and competitive runner since the age of fifteen, I merely attributed the pain to my running. I decided to go to a podiatrist, who gave me an injection in each foot for the pain. The relief lasted almost six months; then, I started having severe inflammation in my fingers. I also found it hard to get out of bed, and had little energy throughout the day. After my regular physician did blood work, several days later I received a call that one of the tests had come back positive: the diagnosis was rheumatoid arthritis. I had no idea what it was; I was way too young to have arthritis, wasn't I? So I did what most of us do when we find ourselves in unfamiliar territory and went into research mode, searching the Internet for anything I could find. Fortunately, I found The Arthritis Foundation website, which explained to me in terms I could understand just what RA was, how it affected my body, and how medicine can help block the destruction of my joints. My physician referred me to Arthritis Consultants, and it was here I met my rheumatologist, Dr. Akgun Ince. Together, after having tried medication after medication, we finally found a combination that worked for me. Today, I give myself an injection once a week and take NSAIDs as well. I decided I had to take charge of my life; there were a lot of people out there that had it much worse than me and this disease was not going to stop me from living the life I once had nor prevent me from having the life I want. I began cross training, spinning and continued running (just not pounding the pavement five days a week!). I now work out with a trainer two days a week and recently, through a healthful diet and exercise, lost 29 pounds, lessening the stress on my joints.

I am excited to say that I have experienced little to no pain for the past six years. My love for running has continued; completing three marathons and seven half marathons in the past several years, and I am excited about competing in the New York marathon on November 4th. I have also coached several adult running groups, recently shifting gears to assist in coaching a program called "Girls on the Run." I love being that person that inspires others to do what they didn't think was possible. I share my story with my groups and others to emphasize that no matter what challenges you may encounter in life, you are not alone. You may need to modify the exercise/task that you are trying to do, but anything is possible.

The Arthritis Foundation is a valuable resource to both patients and physicians, and without your support, this resource may be limited to the many that need and appreciate its encouraging headways in finding a cure and ongoing updates that give us hope. I am asking each of you to join me on Sunday, November 18th at Harrah's Casino for the Jingle Bell 5k Run/Walk. If we all work together and raise awareness and funds for this disease, we will find a cure.

I look forward to meeting each of you on the 18th – and again, I am humbled and honored to represent those of us who have learned what it means to live with rheumatoid arthritis -- and how together we can learn how to make RA just one small part of our life – not the whole wonderful life we should – and can – have!

Jean