



Caitlyn Roberts
2013 Jingle Bell Run/Walk Honoree
Indianapolis, Indiana

Caitlyn Roberts is used to twists and turns. The 12-year old competitive gymnast has had her fair share both in and out of the gym.

Caitlyn was diagnosed with juvenile rheumatoid arthritis (JRA) when she was just three years old. The teachers at her daycare had noticed she was limping.

"My first response was how dare they ask if something was wrong with my child," Caitlyn's mom Lisa recalls. "I was ready to pull her out of the daycare and place her somewhere else. Fortunately though, we took her to the doctor." Doctors ran an arsenal of tests on Caitlyn, but it would be weeks before her family got the proper diagnosis.

"During that time Caitlyn took a turn for the worse," Lisa recalls. "She was in pain and walked like a little elderly lady hunched over." Doctors found more than a dozen of Caitlyn's joints riddled with arthritis including her neck, elbows, wrists, fingers, left hip, left jaw, knees, ankles and feet. Doctors drained the excess fluid around her joints and gave her six cortisone injections to reduce the swelling.

"The diagnosis was a parent's worst nightmare," Lisa recalls. "The doctors told us that if we didn't get her joints and muscles working, she could end up in a wheelchair for the rest of her life."

Caitlyn now manages her arthritis with weekly Methotrexate injections – a cancer drug that reduces inflammation and has proven effective in treating long-term joint damage in kids with arthritis – as well as twice monthly injections of Humira.

Caitlyn is from Camby and is a seventh grader at Decatur Middle School. She is a straight-A student, plays the clarinet in the band and sings in the choir. She dreams of one day being a rheumatologist herself. Caitlyn is also a competitive gymnast – practicing up to nine hours a week.

"It has been a challenge being a gymnast with JRA," admits Caitlyn. "I have had to compete in a lot of pain, but I refuse to let arthritis get in my way. Anything is possible with the help of my family, coaches and doctors."

"Gymnastics has not always been easy for her," Lisa admits. "But she is so determined and is not letting anything get in the way for her true passion. Each and every day I wish that I could take this horrible disease from her, but I cannot. I just let her know how much I love her and how proud I am of what she has accomplished."

The Arthritis Foundation is proud to have Caitlyn Roberts as the 2013 Jingle Bell Run/Walk Honoree.

About the Arthritis Foundation

The Arthritis Foundation (www.arthritis.org) is committed to raising awareness and reducing the unacceptable impact of arthritis, which strikes one in every five adults and 300,000 children, and is the nation's leading cause of disability. To conquer this painful, debilitating disease, we support education, research, advocacy and other vital programs and services.