

Taking control

My body, my rules

By Catherine Jordan

It has taken me a long time to write this. I needed to be honest with myself and everyone around me, about what I was really going through. Diagnosed at the age of 35 with stage 3 breast cancer was scary because of the unknown, but empowering at the same time as my determination to beat this was my top priority. It made me realize what was important: my values, self-worth, goals and dreams and, most importantly, my physical being. Even though cancer made me realize all this I still struggled with the stereotype that was out there.

Having doctor appointments, the surgery date and not having a clue of my treatment plan; I pulled up my big girl pants and got to it. Four days of hospital rest after surgery, and trying to be patient about the pathology report, was tough. I admit I moped around the house for two weeks but, in my defense, I had tubes hanging out of my abdomen for drainage.

My surgery included a mastectomy with reconstruction and yes, I chose the tummy tuck option. My reasoning was that if my body was going to hate me then it could hate all of me. To this day I am still happy with the results of my tummy tuck (they do have a technical term for this, DIEP flap).

I was also a firm believer that putting foreign objects into my body was not going to make this any better. My best example of a foreign object is the port I received for chemo

treatment. I was warned about the pain I may experience for a few days, but I experienced it for several days to the point of constant pain, and even tears, because it hurt so badly.

People who know me will tell you that I can tolerate pain, but this was so unbearable that I was not able to sleep. I remember my husband telling the doctor “She never complains about pain and I have seen her take a lot. This is bad, because she is in tears.” The doctor believed him but still nothing could be done, except morphine to ease the pain.

Eventually my body got used to it. Even today, I feel the scar tissue; the right side of my body may never be the same, but it is part of me and I can embrace that.

Mentally, I thought I was okay. Today I can be honest and say I was scared and still am. I read over my pathology report, where it stated that 20 lymph nodes were extracted and four were malignant. I consider myself lucky.

I had an amazing

doctor who truly listened to me and what I was feeling. He referred me to an amazing lymphedema therapist, Linda Menzies.

I consider myself active in so many ways, especially with two young boys. The one thing I vowed to myself and my husband was that I was going to have a great quality of life for my boys. If cancer was going to take it, it was going to be with a bang. I wanted my boys to have good memories of mom and not memories



Catherine Jordan is a mom of two active boys, a wife to a farmer and a lover of the outdoors. Five years have passed and she didn't know if she would be the same active person she was then. Now she is embracing her body, keeping active and living her best life with lymphedema.



where I was sick and couldn't play catch, swim, ski or snowboard with them. When I met Linda for the first time, she really listened and encouraged me to continue with my activities.

My therapist measured me for compression sleeves and provided everyday exercises to assist my arm (right arm dominant). Her guidance, understanding, and knowledge have made my journey the best. She was the light I needed, the cheerleader that keeps you going. Things creep up on me though and I know that if ever I need the extra push Linda is there for me.

I see her regularly to monitor my arm and measure to see if there is an increase in size. As most of you know, lymphedema is not always fun and when you have let it go too far there is no going back. I wanted to be proactive and, if anything, nip this in the bud before it did get out of hand. I noticed that my arm would get swollen from regular activity. When it felt sluggish compared to my other arm, work needed to be done. When I went to my appointments there were slight increases in measurements. Funny how half to a full centimeter can give symptoms. Linda even showed me how to do a lymphatic drainage treatment myself to assist when I notice these small changes in my arm. Wow, it is truly amazing to know the lymphatic system, and to be so in touch with your body to know when it needs attention.

I stay active with skiing, snowboarding, biking, hiking, walking, taekwondo, swimming, gardening, along with helping with farm chores and many more activities with my family. Staying active takes my mind off the fact that I have lymphedema. One small thought can change your view of everything. The thought of my lymphedema getting worse scares me. I know everything that my therapist has

taught me is going to get me through this. I did drainage myself along with taping my arm, using kinesio tape. Linda taught me how and where to apply the tape, and leave it on my body for at least a week. This has done wonders for me, and my arm no longer feels sluggish or sore.

In between tapings I do wear compression sleeves, not the plain ones either; I embraced this with some great designs on the compression sleeves. Compression sleeves are a definite must, wearing them all day helps keep my arm going and the fluid moving. When my boys and I are in taekwondo class, it improves my punches, blocks, and knuckle pushups!

Some days the thought of my lymphedema getting worse creeps into my head. The thought continues and then my arm begins feeling sluggish and sore. That one small thought changes the mind body connection. If I am going to be true to myself, I have been slacking off on taping and wearing my sleeve because my arm felt great for some time. But then that thought creeps in - I need to discipline myself to continue my proactive practices and

not let them go, because it can go downhill faster than I can on skis.

The mind is a tricky place to be. Each day I meditate to give me clarity and a positive connection with my body. It is not the easiest of habits for me to get into, but I make the time and journal the difference it makes. I do remind myself to do this and have it written down in my calendar.

So here I am five years out since diagnosis and still scared about what the future may bring, but I have control of how I feel and even if it is a brave face I need to put on, I embrace it. It is the little things I do now, like wearing a compression sleeve every other day or taping for one week out of a month or better and staying active and aware of my limits, that keeps me brave and moving forward. I have become more aware of what my body is telling me, and I am truly listening. Honestly, it is hard as we all get caught up in the hustle and bustle of the days, weeks, and months.

My recommendation is to take one or two hours a day just for you. Do something that makes you feel alive, something that you



embrace whole-heartedly without a second thought. I practice yoga to assist me with listening to my body and heightening my awareness of where I need attention. Knowing this assists me.

With my therapist's help I can control the fear that so many let consume them. I am no expert, just a girl fighting for a better understanding of my journey. I encourage anyone who has that small thought of fear to join forces with experts like Linda and be proactive for your body, mind and spirit. LP



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