

OVERCOMING KNEE ARTHRITIS – GEORGETTE’S REMARKABLE RETURN TO SPORT



“I thought... I can actually be an athlete again, which is something that was exciting. Before the brace, I didn’t have that outlook. I thought, in regard to participation in sport, it was pretty much over.”

Not even the most physically capable of us are immune to Knee osteoarthritis. At 52 years old, former Candian Olympian Georgette Reed had reached her breaking point. Crippling knee pain had forced her to put her master’s track and field career on hold, caused her to pull out of her recreational women’s hockey league and now she was having trouble with the stairs in her own home. *“Sometimes I would come into work and I could barely walk,”* remarks Georgette. *“I wasn’t as active as I wanted to be”*. The healthy lifestyle she had lived for so long, had gotten much more difficult to maintain. Like many, being less active led to steady weight-gain, compounding her situation further. *“I decided I needed to make a change”*. And that is exactly what Georgette did. Fast forward five months (March - July 2019) she had lost an astounding 53 lbs and was back doing what she loved.



The daughter of CFL Hall of Famer George Reed, sport has played a foundational role throughout Georgette's life. From swimming, water polo, track and field, to bobsled, her athletic [accomplishments](#) are so numerous that it would take several pages to list them all. She is best known for her accolades on the track, where she attended the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona for the shotput event and was a consistent top performer during her 15-year stint with the Canadian National Team. After retiring from Olympic-level sport, Georgette kept going, entering a new sport, women's ice hockey, and began regularly competing in master's level track and field events.

While she enjoys sport immensely, being so physically active combined with a 19-year multi-sport career as a high-level athlete took its toll on the former Olympian's knees. She had also suffered a series of knee injuries affecting her bursae and meniscus. *"I already had knee issues from my competing days"* Georgette explains. *"But as you get older, everything slows down, my knees were getting worse and worse. Come 2018 I couldn't really do much of anything. I had to stop playing hockey and couldn't train properly for my master's track and field athletic events."*

Georgette had been diagnosed with arthritis and meniscal damage in both knees. The ongoing pain had her constantly reaching for painkillers. *"Ibuprofen all the time, I tried the Voltaren, I iced my knee a lot, all just to stay on top of the inflammation."* Her active lifestyle began to decline causing her to gain weight. The vicious cycle of joint pain, the adoption of more sedentary habits, along with weight gain is an all too common scenario for many with knee osteoarthritis. *"Once you stop being active, you put on lots of weight and if you can't move due to your knee pain it's really difficult to think about weight loss"* explains Georgette. Making this situation even more challenging, is that from a mechanical standpoint, the knee joint is



disproportionately affected by weight gain. For every 11lb of body weight gained, the equivalent of 4 lbs of pressure is placed on the knee joint during simple walking activities.

In February (2018), Georgette, underwent arthroscopic knee surgery to clean up meniscus damage in both knees. Dealing with two post-surgical knees simultaneously was a challenging experience, she began looking for options to supplement her surgery and rehab. *“I decided it was time to do something, although, what I didn’t know. I tried a whole bunch of different things from food regimes, compression sleeves acupuncture, but I just wasn’t getting the support I needed.”*

A few months later she came across the Levitation knee brace online and watched some of the testimonials provided by other Spring Loaded customers. *“I was really inspired by the [82-year old hockey player](#). I saw the girl with [multiple sclerosis](#), [the weightlifter](#) and thought maybe this will help me return to my active lifestyle. I decided to try it out.”* After consulting a Spring Loaded Bracing Specialist she sent in her measurements and ordered a brace for each of her ailing knees.

“I had double knee surgery as well in February of 2018 to clean out my knees. The braces gave me the confidence I needed to get going afterward. Whether it was walking the dogs or being out in the snow without feeling like you are going to hurt yourself. I used the braces to help myself get up and down stairs. They helped a lot, especially the spring assist feature going up the stairs, and the support going down to stop my knees from collapsing.”

Wearing a knee brace, particularly one on each leg, requires an adjustment period to get used to the support and customize the fit. Georgette used them on occasions where she felt unstable, but continued to really struggle with knee pain during many unbraced activities. Her doctor suggested corticosteroid and hyaluronic acid injections, but she refused, hoping she could return to form through more conservative means, she refused. Georgette decided enough was enough and started working with a physiotherapist and wearing her Levitation Knee braces more regularly, in particular during her workouts.

“I put them on and realized that I now had the stability that could allow me to get more active. Knowing I had that support, it motivated me to get going again” Explains Georgette. *“I decided that if I could do 20 minutes of exercise a day, things would start to get better.”* In March 2019, sporting two Levitation knee braces, she committed to a regular exercise regime. It was slow at first, but she steadily built back the strength in her legs to the point where she relied on the knee braces less and less.

Without skipping a beat Georgette continued to progress, holding herself accountable to her goal of exercising a minimum of 20 minutes per day. *“Before I knew that 20 minutes turned into*

30, 35 and then I was doing full programs again like before.” With the increased activity came improvements in body composition, and the motivation to eat better. In July, several months later, she had lost a total of 53lbs and was feeling like her old self again. Now, she’s on to bigger and better things, setting her sights on competing at the World Master’s Track and Field Championships in Toronto this summer.

At this point, It’s worth pointing out that Georgette knows more than the average person about setting and following through on goals. Apart from her career as a world-class athlete, she also holds a Masters degree in Coaching Sciences from the University of Alberta and has spent a decade as the head coach of the UofA track and field team. When asked about what she would tell those facing similar challenges she had this to say:

“You have to set realistic and attainable goals. People try to change everything at once, but you need to change one small thing at a time. Once you are moving forward and feeling better, you’ll want to eat better, you’ll start to make better choices. When you go from the ‘I have to mindset’ to the ‘I want to mindset’, everything changes.”



The lifetime risk of developing knee arthritis is 45%², and we are succumbing to degenerative joint disease at a younger age than ever before. Many of us, like Georgette, are not ideal candidates for knee replacement surgery due to our age and must seek non-surgical remedies to combat the pain. Experts in this area say diet and exercise are the best medicine to combat knee arthritis. With a little assistance from her Spring Loaded braces, Georgette is living proof that the vicious cycle of knee arthritis, pain, and weight gain can be broken.

Georgette Reed, MA, BPE, CSCS

Georgette Reed is a Canadian Olympian, coach, motivational speaker, and current health and wellness coordinator for Edmonton Fire Rescue Services.

References

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