

Successful Living with Arthritis

Just Put One Foot in Front of the Other

Meet Michael Keaney

Michael Keaney spends his spare time writing poetry, playing golf, and making music in addition to his full-time job. Michael thought he was leading a pretty active life until he got an uncomfortable wakeup call—suddenly, **simple tasks like walking up and down stairs became slow and painful chores and took tremendous effort.** His joints confirmed what his doctor had told him: “You need to lose weight.”



At age 54, Michael weighed 365 pounds and wasn't sure **how to make a change** until he heard about a local Arthritis Foundation program called *Walk With Ease*, one of several community-based exercise programs recommended by CDC to improve quality of life for people with arthritis. “The word ‘ease’ made it attractive. I thought, ‘I’m not going to be asked to run a marathon.’ The takeaway was to be consistent and just do what you can,” he recalls.

Michael enrolled in the program right away and started walking, slowly at first, but regularly. As he progressed through the 6-week *Walk With Ease* program, Michael began to form bonds with other participants. “If I know someone is waiting for me, I’m going to be there. I don’t want to let anyone down.” But it wasn’t until well into those 6 weeks that Michael had a breakthrough: **“When it started, I was being accountable to other people. But I learned that I had to be accountable to myself.”**

Gentle exercises, like walking, and modest weight loss—as little as 10 pounds—are powerful ways to ease joint pain caused by arthritis. **For every pound lost, there is a 4-pound reduction in the load exerted on the knee** and Michael quickly saw results. Ten weeks later, he was so impressed with how he felt that he continued his new lifestyle. “I was breathing better and walking further. I went to New Orleans on vacation and was able to walk all over and keep up with the pack. That’s a victory right there,” he said. He reports decreased pain, improved quality of life, and a better mood. Sixty pounds lighter, Michael no longer has to grip handrails going down stairs or walk slowly; instead, he is now gearing up for his first 5K.

Finding a Voice Through Poetry

Michael reminds others like him that it doesn't take huge changes to see powerful results. **“Just take it easy and be consistent.”** Michael's epiphany is best explained in a poem he wrote about his experience. Through his poetry, Michael speaks to others about the importance of taking charge of their lives, just like he did, **one step at a time.** He writes in his poem “What More Can We Be?”

From good to great to the greater you see,
The greatest achievements are deep within thee,
So take the next step and bring it closer to home,
Remind everybody they are never alone.

I never thought something as simple as walking would have such a life-changing impact on me. Find what works for you, and stick with it.