



*Jennifer Ludwin*

SEPSIS

*“On my first day with my prostheses, I only walked 10 feet. However, the next day I walked 168 feet, then 468 feet and I continued to walk farther each day.”*

It all started with what seemed like a bad sore throat. Little did I know that this sore throat would completely change everything about my life.

On October 17, 2009, I went to the emergency room with flu-like symptoms and dusky colored fingers and toes. I was admitted and intubated that evening. When I arrived in the ER, I was already in septic shock and was diagnosed with H1N1 influenza A.

Because of the combination, I experienced a series of complications which included multiple organ failure, disseminated intravascular coagulation, acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS), gangrene, a neck abscess, and gastrointestinal bleeding. I have had more than 20 major surgeries that include a thoracotomy, an emergency exploratory abdominal surgery, and amputations of both my legs below the knee, the fingers on my left hand, and part of the fingers on my right hand. At an inpatient rehabilitation hospital, I underwent intense physical, speech and occupational therapy daily. I had to relearn how to swallow, walk, dress myself, bathe and perform other daily living skills. When I first started rehab, I could not sit up for longer than 15 minutes and I required assistance. Soon, I was sitting up without assistance for longer time periods. On my first day with my prostheses, I only walked 10 feet. However, the next day I walked 168 feet, then 468 feet and I continued to walk farther each day.

After spending five months in the hospital and rehab, I returned to my parents' home and continued with outpatient rehab. I use prostheses for walking, and with modifications and creativity, I can perform everyday tasks. In autumn 2010, I returned to graduate school, and I'll graduate with two master's degrees in August 2012.

## SEPSIS

- Septic shock occurs when sepsis is complicated by low blood pressure that does not respond to standard treatment (fluid administration) and leads to problems in one or more of the vital organs.
- The condition means that the body does not receive enough oxygen to properly function, and drugs called vasopressors are used to raise the blood pressure.
- Hospitalizations for sepsis, or blood poisoning, more than doubled in the last decade.
- Despite active treatment in the ICU, the death rate is around 50 percent.

Source: Sepsis Alliance—  
[www.sepsisalliance.org](http://www.sepsisalliance.org)

I've resumed a sense of normalcy but I still experience lingering effects from my illness. I had a thoracotomy on my left lung to clear out an infection and scar tissue from ARDS and H1N1 influenza A. Because of this, the left side of my ribcage experiences heightened sensitivity—the slightest touch can cause discomfort. Since numerous nerves were severed during the thoracotomy, this discomfort is due to nerve regeneration.

Scar tissue in my lungs has caused me to not be able to take deep breaths. When I engage in strenuous activities, I often have shortness of breath and take longer to regain my breath. To help break up the remaining scar tissue in my lungs and increase my lung capacity I don't smoke, avoid smokers or smoky places, take the stairs instead of the elevator, and exercise regularly, especially cardio exercise.

I also have a chronic cough and have to clear my throat constantly. My cough is aggravated by smoke, dust, and other airborne particles. Since I have a decreased lung capacity, I run out of breath quicker when speaking and cannot project my voice as well as before I became ill. If I speak for too long, I find that my voice becomes weaker and my cough becomes aggravated. I have to be careful to not strain it, especially in loud environments such as sporting events, bars, and restaurants.

All of these lingering effects interfere with my daily life but have slowly gotten better as the years have passed.

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