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Katherine Torres

University of Central Florida, Katherine.Torres@ucf.edu

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Path to Fitness may be Difficult — But Don't Let Obstacles Get in the Way

By Katherine Torres
UCF Forum columnist
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Katherine Torres is the facilities scheduler at the University of Central Florida's Recreation and Wellness Center.

Talking about personal fitness or weight-loss journeys always seems to be difficult for some people, yet it seems like we are constantly faced by those topics every day on social media and TV. Some people try to share their story in hopes it will inspire or motivate someone to better their life. These stories show people that they are not alone and others struggle with body-image issues in one way or another.

My story is a bit different than most, however, because it is difficult for people with disabilities to find fitness routines that accommodate to their limitations.

While growing up unable to walk or stand, I got my first wheelchair when I was 4 and relied on my upper-body strength for everything I did. I have always been petite but had very strong arm strength. Nutritionists would tell me that I was “underweight” for my age and needed to be put on special diets, yet they would never take into consideration that most of my weight came from my waist up. My legs have never developed enough muscle to add more weight to my body.

All throughout high school I weighed 98 pounds and wore pant size double zero. Reading that, many would say I was too skinny. But based on my situation, this was my normal.

It wasn't until I started college that my body and my health began to change.

At the end of the spring semester of my sophomore year at the University of Central Florida, I was hospitalized and found out I had relapsing-remitting multiple sclerosis. I was put on medication that involved injecting myself three times a week in different areas on my body. Because I was so skinny, when I would inject myself in areas that didn't have a lot of fat, I would get bad reactions and the injections would hurt more than usual.

I decided I needed to gain weight. And I did, but only enough to develop enough fat to help lighten up the pain. I finally hit 107 pounds. Again, this seems to be a small number compared to most 20-year-olds, but again, this was my normal.

Through the years I continued to slowly go up in weight, and after being put on additional medication a year and a half ago, I gained more fat in certain areas of my body than I wanted. However, three years out of college I am still under 120 pounds, with most of that from my waist up.

Now I'm faced with trying to lose some weight and getting back into shape. When you are constantly sitting down, this can be difficult and may take longer than able-bodied individuals.

I am extremely motivated to make a change because wheelchair users have at a higher risk of becoming obese. As we grow, our bodies continue to change, and even though I have been petite all my life, I know I won't be forever.

Just like any fitness or weight-loss journey, finding a routine and a plan that works best for you is always difficult at first.

I am at that point where I want to be a better version of myself physically. I know the journey won't be easy, but with a strong support system in front of me, I know that anything is possible ... just like it can be with you, too, if there are obstacles in your life.

Katherine Torres is the facilities scheduler at the University of Central Florida's Recreation and Wellness Center. She can be reached at Katherine.Torres@ucf.edu.