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JAMIE SHUPAK
thrives with RA

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She's on the **GO**

NY1's on-camera traffic reporter **JAMIE SHUPAK** doesn't let RA slow her down.

Strict eating, sleeping and exercise regimens are Jamie Shupak's most cherished disciplines for managing her rheumatoid arthritis (RA) and busy life, which begins each weekday about 3:30 a.m.

With military precision, the 5-foot-1-inch, 110-pound 32-year-old faithfully does 200 abdominal crunches before showering, dressing and darting to a waiting car that transports her to work at TV station NY1 in New York City. There, she does her hair and makeup while drinking a protein shake before her first traffic report at 5:08 a.m.

It's not the hard-news reporting she had planned to do. But when she returned to her native Philadelphia after graduating from the University of Maryland in 2003, she had a more pressing reality to face: The searing, throbbing pain in her hands and wrists had grown excruciating, as if they were on fire. After months of doctor's appointments and tests, she was diagnosed with RA at age 21. "It was shocking news," says Jamie.

After learning there is no cure, she went on an odyssey of various treatments, with marginal success. "It was devastating, discouraging, isolating," she says. "At one point I was [at the hospital for a biologic infusion], sitting next to patients receiving chemotherapy, wondering, 'Will I end up in a wheelchair? Will I ever have children?' I was 23. The burden of this condition seemed overwhelming."

Over the next four years, her condition worsened. She had permanent damage in her wrists and fingers and an evolving list of medications, including methotrexate and various biologics. Each of them worked for a while, but the pain would return. She also tried

holistic treatments, but nothing seemed to make a difference.

TURNING HER HEALTH AROUND

By her 25th birthday, Jamie had reached her breaking point. She was willing to try anything – including the vegan diet she adopted, with no meat, fish, dairy or eggs. She also stopped drinking alcohol, because it seemed to trigger her arthritis pain.

“For the first time since being diagnosed with RA, I could make a fist without pain,” she says. Although Jamie was (and still is) taking the disease-modifying drug methotrexate, she says her new diet made a big difference.

“I felt like superwoman and even started running 3 to 5 miles a few days a week, [and I ran] a half marathon. I still had pain, but everything was remarkably better,” she says.

Over the next two years she reintroduced fish, eggs and a moderate amount

of alcohol – but she is still committed to eating healthfully.

Cleaning up her diet wasn't the only change that improved her symptoms. She also made changes in her relationships, separating from those that were stressful and toxic, and nurturing those that were supportive and empathetic. She recently became engaged.

POSITIVITY PAYS OFF


Although running several times a week was a great stress reliever, it ultimately proved too hard on Jamie's joints – especially her neck. In July 2011 she had fusion surgery on her vertebrae to alleviate the pain. Giving up running was a loss but, as with all areas of her life, Jamie explored her options and discovered spin classes and Bikram (hot) yoga.

“Jamie has a uniquely positive attitude,” says her rheumatologist Harry D. Fischer, MD, chief of the division of rheumatology at New York's Beth Israel Medical Center. “And she certainly

proves how valuable attitude and the right nutrition can be to one's health, especially with regards to RA. She is a true inspiration.”

She's spreading that inspiration to others worldwide these days. In January 2013, Jamie began sharing her healthy recipes on a food blog. The Scripps Media Company spotted it and turned it into a Web video series. *TV Dinner with Friends* began airing last fall on ulive.com. Shot in her apartment, the series features Jamie's favorite easy-to-prepare dinner recipes. And in November, Jamie's e-book, *Transit Girl* (2013, Polis Books) was published.

“It's easy to say now, but the journey that I've been on because of having RA has been a blessing. I now know what's good for my body and my life, and what I need to do in order to remain relatively pain-free,” she says. —JUDY DIEDWARDO

 To read more about Jamie and watch videos of her cooking series, visit arthritis.org/ArthritisTodayJF14.