

A year ago I was celebrating turning 50 by training for the AthHalf Marathon. Thrilled to be back home in Athens after 3 years abroad, the team from Horizon Physical Therapy was hosting weekly runs. I was always the last to finish the training runs, as an older, heavier runner, but I was still having a great time knowing I could do it. This would be the fourth half marathon I'd run and having the supportive Horizon team on my side while running the streets of Athens made me feel like a kid again.

In October 2015 I completed the 13.1 miles and was much more worn out than usual, but I was determined to keep going. By late January, it became obvious that something was wrong. I was unusually fatigued, my joints and muscles ached, and my brain felt foggy. Nothing seemed to make alleviate my symptoms.

My physician ran numerous tests, but nothing in the results explained my symptoms. I was referred to a rheumatologist. I was suddenly aware that I may be headed for something very frightening. Given the pain, the exhaustion, and foggy-headedness, I was already mourning the plans I had to be an energetic old lady. Instead I felt crumpled, defeated, and depressed. The rheumatologist diagnosed me with fibromyalgia. She shared that, in her experience, the patients who did the best were those who stayed active. I was elated I might be able to run again, one day, maybe.

I realized I wanted to be active but getting dressed and leaving the house felt overwhelming. I tried walking but would be too sore and exhausted to do it again the next day. I gained over 20 pounds on my downslide and lost the muscles I needed to support me at a slow walk. I needed to sleep 10 – 12 hours a night. More often than not, I wanted to cry with frustration. I needed to find solutions.

I learned how to cope with the exhaustion, but I also honed in on the importance of staying active – using moderate exercise as a way to reduce the symptoms. I felt trapped between what I wanted to do and my body's ability to do it.

So I made an appointment with my friends at Horizon Physical Therapy. In the years before, Jimbo Wood, the owner of Horizon, helped me gain the confidence and ability to run long distances safely and comfortably. That confidence in my running ability allowed me to find balance through the most stressful of times. Now I needed his help again; I was at a loss and compared to how my health had been 9 months earlier, I was embarrassed by my condition.

My first appointment with Jimbo after the fibromyalgia diagnosis felt overwhelming, but his sympathy and compassion gave me hope. We agreed to look at this from all the angles we could. One of his first suggestions was using the Alter-G treadmill to help get me moving.

It was the first time I stepped into what I call "Jimbo's Magic Treadmill". The Alter-G treadmill would allow me to exercise at a percentage of my body weight. Jimbo

was right there with me, and adjusted my body weight to 50% to allow me to walk half a mile at 2.7 mph. He calmly reassured me as I started taking steps. I thought half a mile would be too much - it was when I tried on my own-, but I trusted Jimbo, and I wanted to get better. So I did it, and I did feel a little better. I had moved my body and gotten the blood flowing, but I didn't feel beat up for once. I felt tired but in a good way.

And then Jimbo dropped the bomb- he wanted me to use the Alter-G daily for the next two weeks. My initial reaction was that I would be too tired, but I also wanted to feel better. So I began.

While I was there, Jimbo and the whole team at Horizon were so encouraging. They asked how I was feeling, cheered me on, and laughed at my bad jokes! There was such genuine care.

Jimbo had been closely monitoring my progress, and after my first two weeks, we agreed to extend my time on the Alter-G. I was able to go longer and further than I had imagined. Within 6 weeks, I was able to walk three miles at 50% body weight. More importantly, I was sleeping more soundly than I had in months, and my brain was clearer. Seven week after I first crawled into Horizon, I was ready to run again. I was so nervous about it, fearing a relapse but also excited to try.

In the weeks since that time, I'm on the Alter-G five times a week. I am running harder every day, and slowly building up to full body weight. The weight I gained is coming off, and my fibromyalgia symptoms have become much more manageable. The team at Horizon is constantly encouraging and supporting me. Even on days I'd be happy to stay in bed, they make it worthwhile to go workout.

Soon I'll be running on dry land without "Jimbo's Magic Treadmill". It has not been a quick and easy fix - I had to commit to doing it, day in and day out, but I never would have gotten to this point without help. When you see me running through town in the rain, jumping in the puddles, you will know the reason for my pure joy. I've actually been given my life back by the care and compassion of my friends at Horizon Physical Therapy!