



# Young Entrepreneur Overcomes Arthritis at Work

**N**icole Wise learned from a very early age how to overcome adversity. Diagnosed with juvenile arthritis in both elbows and knees when she was only three, she found it difficult to perform the most basic tasks because her disease restricted her mobility.

"I can still recall being scared to walk down the stairs in my home, thinking that the pain in my joints made it impossible," Nicole says. "My mother would always be waiting at the bottom, encouraging me to walk down each step. I later realized that she wasn't pushing me as some form of punishment. She was instilling in me the idea that my disease shouldn't prevent me from doing what others did. She taught me how to live independently with arthritis."

As an entrepreneur, Nicole continues to draw on these lessons. "I have good days and not-so-good days, but I'm careful to go about my work at a moderate pace so that I don't drain my energy," explains Nicole, now 35, who has owned and operated

a coffee shop/pub for 11 years. "I can tell ahead of time when a flare-up in pain will occur, which allows me to reduce my workload. I also use arthritis-friendly kitchen products, such as a knife with a bent handle, which put less strain on my joints."

Nicole has benefited from the understanding and support of her colleagues. "We work as a team. They know there are certain things I can't do, such as lifting an object more than five pounds, so they help me work around that," she says. "At the same time, they know that my arthritis doesn't prevent me from making a contribution."

Nicole's experience proves that the right combination of careful planning, adjustments in the workplace and open communication with co-workers makes it possible to balance the pain and fatigue of arthritis with the demands of a job.

Her advice to anyone with arthritis is: "Be aware of your limitations, but don't let them stop you from working like everyone else."

## Arthritis Workplace Tips

- Asses your work environment
- Plan ahead and pace yourself
- Maintain a good posture
- Take care when moving or lifting
- Consider ergonomic aids

To learn more, please visit [www.arthritis.ca/workplace](http://www.arthritis.ca/workplace)



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# Studying the Effects of Arthritis in the Home and Workplace

Catherine Hofstetter, of Toronto, has lived with arthritis for more than 17 years, but for the first decade of her disease her rheumatologist never once asked how arthritis was affecting her home life and work.

Canadian researchers have been studying the issue of arthritis and its effect in the home and the workplace to devise strategies and to ensure that these essential parts of a person's life are taken seriously and addressed.

"People take tasks such as parenting and housework for granted and don't think they're worth studying," says Dr. Catherine Backman, a member of the Canadian Arthritis Network and Associate Professor with the University of British Columbia. She hopes that her work examining the impact of chronic, inflammatory arthritis (IA) on parenting will offer coping solutions and resources that will benefit mothers with IA and, ultimately, their children.

Other researchers with the Canadian Arthritis Network (CAN) have been exploring how to measure work, worker productivity

and the costs associated with lost productivity due to arthritis. They are mindful of how important this issue is to workers, employers and the Canadian economy.

CAN researchers recently organized a meeting with international experts to examine absenteeism, presenteeism (at-work productivity loss) and other measures of workplace productivity. Their successful efforts to collaborate with colleagues from other countries will take time to produce results that translate into guidelines or policy to be adopted by Canadian employers, but the important first step has been put in motion.

Explains Dr. Dorcas Beaton of the Keenan Research Centre, Li Ka Shing Knowledge Institute at St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto, "We had to do it. Forming [an international alliance] seemed like the only way to pull the worker productivity groups together from around the world to work together instead of in parallel."

This is only a small sample of the work that CAN researchers are involved in to make the lives of people living with arthritis a little easier.

## Arthritis Workplace Facts

There are more than four million Canadians living with arthritis. It is the leading cause of disability in Canada today because more than 600,000 Canadians with arthritis are unable to work. This translates into an economic burden in Canada that is estimated to be \$4.4 billion.

Long-term disability and lost productivity account for almost 80 per cent of arthritis-related costs, with 70 per cent of these costs incurred by individuals aged 35-64.



The Arthritis Society and the Canadian Arthritis Network share a common vision of a world without arthritis. They have been working together towards this goal since The Arthritis Society helped establish the Canadian Arthritis Network in 1998.

Experienced and new researchers funded through the two partnering organizations are working hard to find treatments and a cure for arthritis. Reach them at [www.arthritis.ca](http://www.arthritis.ca) and [www.arthritisnetwork.ca](http://www.arthritisnetwork.ca)



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