



LIFESTYLE

Step by Step

Jo Giese's journey from a life-changing injury back to the trails



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When [Jo Giese](#) was just five years old, her mother would dress her in a lacy pinafore and send her into the Seattle woods all by herself. Wandering along the soft, bark-covered path, she would admire the canopies of evergreen trees overhead as she breathed in fresh, forest air.

Between her solo woodland walks and family trips to a local waterfall, Giese developed a lifelong passion for nature and hiking. “It’s being outdoors; it’s the whole of nature,” she explains, “it’s just that feeling of disconnecting.” But everything changed one rainy November afternoon when Giese had an accident at home, threatening her ability to ever walk again.

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From tragedy to triumph

Giese describes her accident matter-of-factly. She had been headed down the stairs at home when she missed a step, and as she says, “went flying horizontally”. Her husband rushed her to the hospital where she learned that she had completely torn her left Achilles, leaving her unable to walk.

After a series of unsuccessful surgeries and an infection, Giese’s injury was irreparable. “In my case, it died,” she says, speaking of her left Achilles. Most people struggle to walk without an intact Achilles because they don’t have the strength for the push-off phase needed to take a step.

Giese’s doctor informed her that her walking would always be compromised, but instead of accepting defeat, this motivated her. “One thing a medical professional does not have the right to do is to take hope away from you. And that’s all I had at that point—hope,” she explains.

She left the doctor’s office with a renewed sense of purpose and took ownership of her health. Giese found a physical therapist who offered exploratory exercises and collaborated with several doctors to give her different types of treatments, from acupuncture to [hyperbaric oxygen therapy](#). After two and a half years of hard work, she was able to walk and took to the trails once again.

Mind over matter

In Giese’s new book, *You’ll Never Walk Alone: A Hiker’s Memoir of Adventure, Tragedy and Defying the Odds*, (Amplify Publishing, 2026), she chronicles her story of resilience and grit with the hope that it’ll inspire others who have a medical condition or experience setbacks in their recovery. “If you’re given a grim

diagnosis, you don't have to accept it," she says. "When people would ask me, 'do you consider yourself an ex-walker or an ex-hiker?' I would go, 'No way!'"

Still, despite her positive outlook and steady determination, Giese would sometimes get discouraged, especially when she'd hear comments about her slower pace. She recalls one time someone asked her why she was limping. "It was like an arrow to the chest because I didn't feel like I was limping," she explains. Giese almost let her thoughts get the best of her until she recalled that her physical therapist had shared invaluable advice: "To compare is to despair. Drop it." And, so, she did.

Giese's confidence and enthusiasm are unquestionable, and they may have played a role in her recovery. A positive mindset is more powerful than we often realize. Positive emotions enhance our immune response and stimulate the cells responsible for fighting off infection and disease. Thinking optimistically can also help you overcome feelings of anxiety and depression.

There are a few ways to develop a more positive outlook.

[Reducing negative self-talk](#) can help reframe our thoughts. Try to be gentle with yourself when you make mistakes, and practice gratitude to be more mindful and remember the good.

We can boost our mood by hiking too. Spending time in nature lowers the stress hormone, cortisol. When this happens, our blood pressure and heart rate decrease as well, allowing our entire body to relax. Hiking also gives our nervous system a break from packed schedules and technology by slowing things down and allowing us to take in a quiet, natural setting.

Proactive aging

As we age, preventive care can help us lower the risk of illness and detect chronic conditions early.

Annual checkups and screenings monitor age-related changes that often begin before symptoms appear. Add a reminder to your calendar so that you don't forget to schedule them!



Movement for well-being

Hiking exercises our body and improves our mood, but it isn't the only way to remain active. You can incorporate a workout into your lifestyle whether you like to walk, run, swim, or something else.

Any form of movement can help you stay connected to the things you love, just as it does for Giese. Meeting new people and socializing with friends are some of her favorite aspects of hiking. "I've been walking and hiking since I was five years old. It's often the way I connect with people," she explains. "Maybe I'll pass some neighbors on the way, smile. They'll ask how I'm doing. And it just refreshes my head. It always has."

We all have the abilities Giese displayed throughout her recovery; we just need to know how to tap into them. Resilience is something we want to strive for, especially as we age. It helps us bounce back from an injury or life's challenges so that we can continue to enjoy a sense of well-being. Having a [positive mindset](#) is one part of resilience, but movement also plays a role in the way we adapt to stressors. It promotes elasticity of mind and body, allowing us the flexibility we need to stay well and active.

According to Giese, you don't even need to live near a trail to reap the [benefits of hiking](#). "I'm lucky in Bozeman, Montana, where basically I can walk out our front door and hike anywhere. And not everybody is that fortunate, but most everybody has a park nearby. There are tons of parks around the United States," she says.

Giese's journey is a reminder that determination and small daily steps can lead to remarkable recovery and renewed joy. Her story proves that even after life's toughest challenges, we can find strength and keep moving.

Keep it moving'

Mobility exercises can help you carry out everyday chores and tasks more efficiently and keep you prepared to hit the trails. Plus, they're easy to squeeze into a busy day. Here are three simple moves to try:

- **Biceps curl:** With a weight or soup can in each hand, start with your arms by your side and bring your forearms to your chest, then slowly lower them back down. Repeat 12 times.
- **Cat-cow:** In a kneeling, table-top position, arch your back and look upward as you breathe in. On the exhale, pull your stomach in while rounding your back. Repeat 10 times.
- **Heel-toe:** Standing straight while pulling your abs in, place one foot in-line with the other so that they're heel to toe. Extend your arms up and out for balance and walk as though you're on a balance beam, placing one foot in front of the other. Walk slowly.



Muscle-supporting supplements

Eating whole foods provides essential vitamins and minerals, but the right supplements can offer additional support for your muscles..

Magnesium is a mineral that can reduce high blood pressure, ease anxiety, and support our muscles. Studies show that magnesium supplements decrease muscle soreness, improve recovery, and protect against muscle damage.

Foods such as peas, seeds, and beans contain plant-based proteins and are an essential part of many diets. These proteins help build muscle mass and strength, and **plant-based protein powders** containing important muscle-building amino acids can be used as a supplement.

Collagen is the primary building block for our skin, bones, and muscles. Many people use a supplement to boost their hair and nail growth, but it can also strengthen our muscles and help them recover from injuries.

Vitamin D can also help in muscle recovery by strengthening our muscles, reducing the risk of injury, and improving exercise performance. Since many people don't get enough vitamin D, doctors often tell patients taking a supplement can increase levels.

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Next »

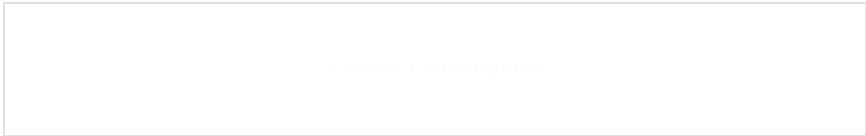


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Gina Kelly is a freelance writer and editor located in New Jersey, US. She is a certified health coach and writes about health and wellness.



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