



my Lupus journey

Suzi Swinehart

Meet Suzi Swinehart. Suzi is a wife, a mother, a behavioral therapist, and an ultramarathon runner who has lupus. And she's facing the ultimate challenge in July 2019, when she completes with 99 of the most elite runners in a 135 mile, 3-day foot race across Death Valley, CA.

Suzi, 46, initially noticed symptoms of lupus in her late 20s. She was tired and achy all the time. She then suffered three miscarriages, caused by antiphospholipid syndrome, a blood-clotting disorder commonly associated with lupus. She already had symptoms of the autoimmune disorder, and two years later, when she got the infamous skin rash, she was officially diagnosed.

"I was really sick for a while," Suzi said. "My kidneys were affected, and I was in the hospital off and on. I had to be on really extreme chemotherapy drugs, and I lost all my hair. There were about four years where I couldn't run, I couldn't really function, and they put me on tons and tons of meds."

Suzi had been a competitive runner for her entire young life, and fearing the worst, told her husband she was worried that her lupus diagnosis meant the end of her running career. But after a few years, as she and her doctors began to effectively manage her symptoms, Suzi was thrilled to be able to return to running.

"I felt like the more I ran, the better I felt," Swinehart said. "I felt like it was a sign: 'If I can run this much, I'm healthy.' You get in a mindset sometimes, when you're diagnosed with a chronic disease, that you're sick and you can't do anything. And I just decided that I'm not going to have that mindset, I'm going to be out running, it just had a really positive effect on me."

Swinehart is an amazing runner, no doubt. She set a world record in 2016, running 73.3 miles on a treadmill in 12 hours, breaking the previous 12-hour treadmill record by almost 5 miles. This past March, she was the women's winner at Badwater Cape Fear, a 51.4-mile race on Bald Head Island in North Carolina. That win earned her a spot at the 2019 Badwater 135, which is known as "the world's toughest foot race." The 135-mile route begins in California's Death Valley and finishes at the trailhead for Mount Whitney. "I think the benefits outweigh the negative; it definitely takes me a little longer to recover from 100-mile race because of lupus, my body takes a big hit," Swinehart said. "That's kind of my personality, I'm rebellious, and I rebel against this disease, and it's not going to stop me. You force yourself to put on your running shoes and get out the door and run."

Badwater 135 includes more than 8,500 feet of climbing and takes place in July, when temperatures in Death Valley can approach 130 degrees. Because of the magnitude of this race, organizers encourage competitors to run for a cause. And we are thrilled that Suzi, not surprisingly, will be racing for the Lupus Foundation of America, Indiana Chapter, which provides support and funds research. We have no doubt that Suzi will accomplish her goal this July and we'll be with her all the way!

Help Us Solve
The Cruel Mystery

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