



A new talk show about how to live well with rheumatoid arthritis (RA).

## **Kia Redding**

*Kia Redding, from PA, living with RA for more than 10 years*

### **Q: What advice do you have for others when they are diagnosed?**

“If somebody else had rheumatoid arthritis, I would suggest try to keep all relationships that you can because having a support system is definitely key to holding on, getting through each day when you need a shoulder to cry on.

So try to work as hard with the person that you want to hold on to, as many as you can. Sit them down one-on-one and just tell them more information regarding the rheumatoid arthritis, regarding your abilities, your inabilities, and then just hope they’re understanding enough that they’ll want to stick it out with you.

And a lot of times if you do that and they’re strong enough people, then they’ll stay with you, as well.”

### **Q: How do you deal with your pain?**

“Always being tired, I just move through it. When I have something to do, I just move through it, and when I don’t have something to do, I just make sure I get plenty of rest.”

### **Q: How do you learn to maintain a healthy lifestyle with RA?**

“...by listening to my body. I changed the diet. I try to eat more organic, more healthier, and make sure I always have enough of natural juices and not so much sugar because that works better for my body.”

### **Bios:**

Kia has learned over the years how to educate loved ones about her condition. It is important for Kia to remain independent, particularly so that her daughter, who is entering college, does not have to worry about her living alone.

Kia was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis roughly 10 years ago and has struggled to stay in control of her disease. She has learned over the years how to deal with certain friends who do not understand her limitations and has helped to educate loved ones about her condition. It is important for Kia to remain independent, particularly so that her daughter, who is entering college, does not have to worry about her living alone.

### **First Person:**



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“When I was first diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis, I was afraid, shocked, and stunned. I was asking myself, ‘Was I still going to be able to take care of my daughter? Would I be there for her, see her prom, and still be able to function as a regular mother?’

So, I had to adjust my life. For example, by adapting from cooking a meal every day to cooking just on Sundays, cooking maybe two to three meals at a time, so that when I wasn’t able to cook, or wasn’t feeling well, there was already something prepared, and all I had to do was just heat it up.

When I have something to do, I just move through it, and when I don’t have something to do, I just make sure I get plenty of rest. And the pain? Sometimes that’s kind of hard.

Well, exercise? I try. But throughout the day, I turn on the radio and listen to a song and just dance.”



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## **Wanda Gonzalez**

*Wanda Gonzalez, from New Jersey, living with RA for more than 9 years*

### **Q: How do you live with RA?**

“My positive attitude is what keeps me living day by day. I don’t believe just pondering on the fact that ‘You know, I have an illness and a disease that I’m to have for the rest of my life’ is going to take me anywhere.

Every day – every minute that I have that I can move, that I can, you, live, I am going to take advantage of it. You can. Anybody can. It’s just a matter of making adjustments. Getting – and getting treatment.”

### **Q: What keeps you motivated?**

“I have four children and four grandchildren, and I have to live. I have to live for them, and that’s the bottom line. It doesn’t matter what I have to do. You know, and I have other – I have other issues aside from this.”

### **Q: What have you learned while living with RA?**

“The biggest surprise I found about myself was actually my inner strength. I’m really surprised that I have the attitude that I have knowing what I know.

My family has helped me. I mean a great deal. I have such a wonderful support system. And I think that, you know, though they might not realize it, they are my strength.”

### **Bios:**

A parent and grandparent, Wanda has an active and rewarding life despite her rheumatoid arthritis. Over the years, she has made many adjustments in response to the changes in her condition, empowering her to never give up.

When Wanda was first diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis, she feared that it meant the end of her active lifestyle. But thanks to the support of her 4 daughters and a positive attitude, Wanda is always on the move—planning weddings, taking care of grandchildren, or enjoying time with friends. An avid exerciser, Wanda has made some changes to her routine since being diagnosed—trading in her free weights and spinning classes for a pair of walking shoes—and says that healthful eating and regular exercise help her to feel her best.



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**First Person:**

I was diagnosed about nine years ago. At first, I had a few flare ups, but at that point, I didn't know that they were flare ups. They were treated like tendonitis. And then one year, it got really bad. I woke up and I felt I was almost crippled. I couldn't walk, and I was in a lot of pain, and that's when I went to see a specialist.

Because I didn't know anything about it, the fear was just overwhelming. But I went to the doctor. I got on medication. I followed his instructions.

Because I've educated myself more, I'm able to know that this is something that I can address, I can fight it, regardless of whether there's no cure or not. It's something I can actually live with.

I have four daughters, and they keep me pretty busy. I really don't try to think too much of the negative aspects of it.



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## **Joyce Moore**

*Joyce Moore, from Washington, DC, living with RA for more than 15 years*

### **Q: Did any of your relationships change after your diagnosis?**

“People changed in that they became, I think, more caring after a while. After they decided that, you know, this is something that’s really severe, it’s going to affect my life totally.”

“I think people became, eventually became more caring. More considerate.”

### **Q: You have two sons. How have they dealt with your illness?**

“Both of them became very helpful. The older one . . . he would try to cook sometimes and deal – dealt with the younger one more, more than he probably would have ordinarily.

Now they are much older and much more considerate . . . They’ll call. They want to know how I’m doing, and do I need something or do I want to go somewhere.”

### **Q: How is living with RA today rather than 15 years ago?**

“It’s easier in that there are more medications. It’s not an easy disease to deal with ever, I don’t think. It’s just that, the medications now help a lot more. You’re not in -- well, I’m not in as much pain as I have been in the past.”

### **Bios:**

When Joyce first noticed swelling in her knees, she thought she had injured herself in step aerobics class. After being misdiagnosed first with lupus and then sarcoidosis, she was correctly diagnosed with RA.

When Joyce first noticed swelling in her knees, she thought she had injured herself in step aerobics class. After being misdiagnosed first with lupus and then sarcoidosis, Joyce’s rheumatologist correctly diagnosed her with RA. As a single mother, Joyce had to rely heavily on her two teenaged sons for help and support.

### **First Person:**



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I think RA affected my work career because I was tired, I mean severe fatigue for a while. I was so focused on feeling better that I kind of lost interest in work. Not until people at work finally understood that I was dealing with chronic pain, did attitudes eventually change.

I told my colleagues right away because I knew that there was going to be some limit in what I was capable of doing. So I had no choice but to tell them right away.

If I had to give someone advice on how to deal with it in the workplace, I would say that you really do have to pace yourself. It's very important to get enough rest. Understand your limitations and talk to your supervisors and coworkers to let them know that this is the illness that you have.



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## **Esther Brasile**

*Esther Brasile, from Connecticut, living with RA for more than 10 years*

### **Q: How do you begin to live with RA?**

“At some point you just have to say, You know, this - - this is it. This is what - - this is what I have. These are my limitations, and - - and I think once you accept that, no matter who you are, whether you even have limitations or not, people are more prone to accept you if - - if you do that for yourself.”

### **Q: How do you manage your illness?**

“I’ve managed to find very creative ways to do some everyday things. Putting on jewelry, necklaces. And my one elbow is limited where it doesn’t bend up far enough to do certain things. The other one is pretty good. So, there are things that I can’t grasp together, and putting on a necklace is one of those things. I’ve learned how to use my mouth, earrings. I’ve learned to put the backs on with one hand.”

“Opening jars. I always pop the seal first with a can opener and then it comes right off. I’ve been known to put plastic over a jar and just throw the cover away altogether.”

### **Q: What advice would you give to someone who was just diagnosed?**

“I would say to – to help someone who is - - is less fortunate than you in some way. I would also say to take care of your heart and mind because if you’re taking care of one of those things, either your heart or your mind, your body has to follow.

But if you listen to your body too much, your - - your body is going to be calling the shots, and that’s not good. So, keep your mind and your heart healthy, and to do that . . . you need to stay active, you need to continue learning, just learning, period. Whatever it might be.”

“You have to have some certain things that you won't waiver on, and you cannot give up. You just cannot give up . . . you have to live by that. You have to keep going, and you have to get up every day and you have to be disciplined and you have to take care of yourself, and you have to . . . stay as healthy as you possibly can. Be in good contact with your doctor so that if something does go wrong, you can get right on it so that it doesn't keep you down for long.

And it's -- it's an everyday challenge. And it's the same with work. You know, don't concentrate on what you can't do. You have to concentrate on what you can do, and not everyone can do everything in life.”



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**Bios:**

A self-employed artist, Esther remains active by swimming every morning.

Esther has suffered from rheumatoid arthritis for many years, but despite her condition she has worked to overcome many obstacles in her life caused by her disease. She’s a self-employed artist and remains active by swimming every morning at her local YMCA, which she feels has helped her cope with morning stiffness over the years. Her siblings, husband, and children are all very supportive and understanding, but she recalls difficult times in her relationships.

**First Person:**

I love to swim. I’ve been swimming for 26 years, 5 days a week and it’s just been the best thing.

I would encourage anyone with RA to swim if they could. I’d be much worse off if I didn’t. I do about a half a mile every day, and I make lots of friends in the pool, too. It’s a very symmetrical exercise so it’s great for RA.

And when it gets boring, I’ve added flippers, I’ve added hand paddles. I try to do a little more, go a little faster. So it’s really a blessing to me to be able to swim.

I still have a dream to this day that I’m going to find a bike that I can ride because I grew up on a bike, and it was really great for my knees. I was always on my bike—I used to do marathons. So, that was probably the one sore spot that used to bother me with my kids, that I couldn’t do that. But they understood perfectly.

So you just find other ways to do things. We camp!



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## **Tom Brasile**

*Tom Brasile, from CT, husband of Esther Brasile, living with RA for more than 10 years*

### **Q: Your wife of 26 years has lived with RA since you were married. How has that been for you?**

“I really didn’t understand much about RA or any kind of arthritis . . .It took -- it took me some months to find out exactly how -- how far-reaching the consequences of the results of the disease were.”

“I don’t think I was too supportive in the beginning because I didn’t know what – what I was called to be doing, but I became supportive. It was kind of necessary to keep the relationship going.”

### **Q: What have you learned over the years?**

“The most challenging thing about a relationship with someone who has RA, is just realizing that they are not going to be at the same . . . level of physical preparedness to go and do something as you – you would be.

I can get up and pretty much run straight out of bed and, you know, take a shot down the street. But, she’s not able to do that, or hasn’t been able to do that at all times you know, in the 26 years we’ve been married.”

“You just have to kind of grow and stretch with the person. . .it’s made me a better person, I think.”

### **Q: How are you supportive of her and her condition?**

“She’s an artist, as you know. . .She produces visual art.. . Anything she’s needed, you know, supplies, money she’s needed to do different projects, we’ve always given her.

And I think that’s important because what you are inside needs to come out of you, and I think that’s a great healing process or part of the healing process.”

### **First Person:**

I really didn’t understand much about RA or any kind of arthritis. I thought it was something that old people had and faded away with. But with Esther, I discovered that you don’t have to be very old to have it.



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In the beginning, I don't think I was too supportive, actually, because I didn't know what I was called to be doing . . .but I became supportive. We're going on our 26th year of marriage this year.

There were some physical tasks that I would have to take on in Esther's place, and that just kind of came naturally. Our kids were very supportive, too. They love their mother and fill in as required. But again, she's such a capable woman and so those instances could be considered few and far between.

She's a real self-starter and that's helped her too, that's kept her going.