

# 'Strong' Calgary girl the youthful face of arthritis sufferers

## Walk to Fight Arthritis scheduled for June 9

BY ANDREA COX, CALGARY HERALD MAY 24, 2013



Claire Moore, 6, was diagnosed with a severe form of juvenile arthritis when she was 18 months old. She and her family are raising awareness and funds for the debilitating disease by taking part in the Walk to Fight Arthritis on June 9.

**Photograph by:** Moore family, Calgary Herald

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On June 9, more than 600 Calgarians will don their walking shoes and step out to raise funds for arthritis research during the Walk to Fight Arthritis.

The walk will bring together people of all ages for an afternoon of camaraderie, exercise, food and fun. The goal is to raise funds and awareness about the potentially life-threatening disease that can affect anyone.

Six-year-old kindergarten student Claire Moore was diagnosed with the disease at 18 months old.

"She woke up one morning in the early summer of 2008 and she couldn't walk," recalls her mom, Natalie Moore.

Suddenly, Claire's life changed dramatically.

"We went to the hospital and they thought she had just fallen or sprained something, so they sent us home," said Moore. "And then she would wake up each morning after that and not be able to walk, but by the afternoon she was running around."

No one could figure out what was wrong. But by the end of the summer, it had become clear — Claire had juvenile arthritis.

Since then, Claire has been in the operating room 10 times and is on a potent cocktail of medications to combat the disease, including low-dose chemotherapy drugs, anti-inflammatory modifying drugs and a bevy of others to counteract the side-effects of the strong medications.

"This is a serious disease," said Moore. "When you have to inject a drug once a week and it says 'Caution, chemotherapy agent' and you are putting that in your daughter's body just so she can walk, it is not easy."

Claire's symptoms are inconsistent — she has good days and bad days.

But in four and a half years, the arthritis has attacked her ankles, knees, hips, neck and eyes; she has decreased vision in one eye (she's had three surgeries) and has to wear sunglasses all the time when she is outside. At night, she wears splints on her legs to keep them straight; if she doesn't, they become locked in a bent position.

But despite everything, Claire is a happy, well-adjusted girl who loves to take dance classes and play with her friends.

"She is so strong; she never complains of pain," said her mom, adding that often Claire won't say anything because she is afraid. "She thinks, 'Well, if I tell you that my knee is sore, then I am going to have to go to the hospital and have surgery.'"

Claire's school, Cochrane Christian Academy, has been supportive. "They have done a great job of keeping her safe — she has her own chair, markers and pencils to help stop the spread of germs and we really appreciate that," said Moore, noting that because of the drugs, Claire's immune system is seriously compromised.

But Claire isn't an anomaly. In fact, 60 per cent of those who suffer from arthritis are under 65 and one out of every 1,000 children in Canada has the disease (there are two in Claire's school, which only has 200 students).

"We really want to spread the word that arthritis can affect anyone and that it is serious. It is not just about your grandpa getting up in the morning and being a little stiff and taking an Advil — there is so much more to it," said Moore.

In Canada, 4.6 million people suffer from 100 different kinds of arthritis, but all basically fall into two major categories: degenerative and inflammatory arthritis.

Degenerative arthritis usually manifests with age and tends to occur in joints that have been subject to wear and tear by excessive use.

Inflammatory arthritis is an auto-immune disease (the body's immune system attacks the joints) that can start at any age. The disease's symptoms can range from mild to debilitating, and 25 per cent of sufferers aged 25 to 44 are unable to work.

But Claire and her family are doing something to help. They have put together a team (The Cochrane Kids) to fundraise and participate in the Walk to Fight Arthritis for the third year in a row.

"I don't know if Claire will be able to walk the whole way, but she will walk as far as she can and ride in the wagon for the rest of the way," said Moore, adding that by doing the walk they are also supporting other family members with the disease (Claire has three grandparents and a great grandfather with the disease).

The walk takes place June 9 at 2 p.m. in Fish Creek Park (Glennfield Area B). There will be music, a free lunch provided by Spolumbo's, face painting and entertainment. To register or donate to the Walk to Fight Arthritis go to [www.walktofightarthritis.ca](http://www.walktofightarthritis.ca). To donate to Claire's team, click on donate, then Calgary Walk, then The Cochrane Kids. All funds raised go to research, education and advocacy and ultimately a cure for arthritis.

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Do you know of a deserving Calgarian that could benefit from a free home renovation? If so, Hearts and Hammers Society wants to know about it. This newly formed grassroots initiative is all about giving back to those in need. The renovation (valued at up to \$50,000) will be awarded to a household that has shown dedication to the city and community, and is deserving of a hand up for a safer, more positive living environment. "I think people might be astonished to see the extremely unpleasant living conditions that some hardworking Calgarians are forced to tolerate because they are unable to afford renovations or repairs," says Dave Bonk, Hearts and Hammers founder.

To make a nomination or to find out more information, please visit [www.heartsandhammers.ca](http://www.heartsandhammers.ca). Nominations are open until June 30.

If you or someone you know is involved in an act of giving, please let us know by sending an e-mail to Andrea Cox at [livingbetter2@yahoo.ca](mailto:livingbetter2@yahoo.ca).

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