

20 MOST INSPIRING STORIES OF 2020



Gina Wileman

Three years ago (at the start of 2018) I lost my health. Symptoms seemed to show up out of nowhere, and my health began to unravel overnight. My once very “fit” and “healthy” body began to turn on itself in every imaginable way. I couldn’t grasp what was happening, and honestly, the doctors couldn’t either. I spent much of the year bounced from specialist to specialist, taking test after test, and being prescribed (literally) handfuls of pills – only to watch my health continue to decline.

It took almost a full year before I discovered my strong and healthy body had NOT turned on me. In fact, it was actually trying to SAVE ME....from the poison I had placed inside of it 10 years earlier.

Looking back now, I realize my body had been giving me (not so subtly) signs almost immediately after my much anticipated breast augmentation. I just didn’t know enough to recognize they were signs. As they say, hindsight is 2020, and it’s crystal clear to me now that although having a breast augmentation is a personal decision, my experience is not one I should keep private. My hope in sharing my journey through Breast Implant Illness is others will be aware of the signs and symptoms and know it is possible to regain their health and fitness on the “lighter side”

Early Signs/Symptoms (1-2 years after breast augmentation) included:

- 2 Capsular Contractures (resulting in *SURGERY* to remove/replace breast implants)
- Thoracic Outlet Syndrome (resulting in *MEDICAL PROCEDURES AND SURGERY* 2 angioplasties and a first rib resection/removal)
- Unexplainable Arm Swelling (only completely resolved after explant)
- Impaired Vision (which returned/improved after explant)

Signs/Symptoms/Diagnosis (10 years after breast augmentation)

- Food Allergies
- SIBO (Small Intestinal Bacterial Overgrowth)
- Chronic Debilitating Fatigue
- Lupus
- Undifferentiated Connective Tissue Disorder
- Fibromyalgia
- Brain Fog
- Sun Light Sensitivity
- Hair Loss
- Night Sweats

In early 2020, it had been two years post breast explant surgery. All of my symptoms had gone away. But, there was still something I had not been able to do. Something - I never thought I would be able to do again. I wanted to get back on an NPC stage and compete. I wanted to train hard, feel strong, and prove to myself I had truly come full circle, and Breast Implant Illness was no longer holding me back from anything.

In the days leading up to competing this year, I reflected on the moment my doctor told me I would spend my days in bed, out of sunlight - never to go to the beach - or run - or lift a weight - or pick up my kids from school – or walk through the mall to look for a prom dress or across a soccer field to watch a game.

I remember the feeling of losing my health - my LIFE - like it was yesterday. I remember the devastation I felt. The tears I cried. So. many. tears.

I also remember the moment my (3rd) rheumatologist acknowledged my breast implants could be the cause for my sudden autoimmune disease. In that moment, she gave me HOPE, and in the weeks following, I decided it was worth the risk to have the breast implant removal. Within weeks, I had scheduled surgery for a full capsulotomy and breast explant with Dr. Bahair Ghazi in Atlanta. After the surgery, my health began to return almost immediately.

Standing on the NPC stage again this year meant much more to me than what anyone in the room could visibly see. While my face certainly beamed with pride, my heart swelled with pride and joy in knowing I’d achieved so much. In that moment, I was taking my life back!!! And, it felt absolutely amazing!

To those struggling with Breast Implant Illness symptoms or contemplating breast explant surgery, you are not alone. Feel free to DM me on Instagram @Gina_Wileman if you would like to know more about my experiences with Breast Implant Illness.

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