



## *Finding Her*

# FIT AGAIN

WHEN LYMPHEDEMA STRUCK HER LEGS, SELF-DESCRIBED “SHOE GIRL” TIMICKI RUSSELL HAD TO GIVE UP HER FAVORITE FOOTWEAR, AS WELL AS HER CHERISHED INDEPENDENCE. MANAGING THE CONDITION WITH THE HELP OF AN EXPERT TEAM ALLOWED HER TO REGAIN BOTH.

**A former cheerleader,** Timicki was used to being fit—and fiercely self-reliant. In early 2016, however, the then 49-year-old Washington resident’s life began to change. Her legs swelled inexplicably, which made putting on shoes difficult.

“The swelling was like nothing I’d ever experienced,” Timicki says. “Over time, my feet got so swollen that I had to cut the top and sides of my shoes to give them room.”

Visits to her primary care physician, endocrinologist and the Emergency Department, as well as two stints in a skilled nursing facility, yielded no definitive answers about what was affecting Timicki. All the while, her quality of life worsened.

“I could barely walk, and I couldn’t work,” Timicki says. “I had to depend on others for help with things like grocery shopping. My cousin, Veronica, was a tremendous anchor for me during some of my most difficult moments. The illness definitely took an emotional toll.”

### **FINALLY, A WAY FORWARD**

In July 2016, on the recommendation of her primary care physician, Timicki visited James Marks, DPM, FACFAS, FAPWCA, Medical Director of the Washington Health System Wound and Skin Healing Center and Hyperbaric Medicine. Dr. Marks provided what Timicki needed most to start the healing process—a diagnosis. He told her she had lymphedema. It was the first time she’d heard the word.

“The body’s lymphatic system is responsible for collecting lymph, a fluid containing waste products from cells and tissues, and transporting it to the lymph nodes,” Dr. Marks says. “The lymph nodes remove the waste, and the lymph eventually recycles back into the blood. If the lymphatic system is injured or disrupted, lymph can accumulate in the affected area of the body, often the legs or arms, and cause swelling. That’s lymphedema.”

No cure exists for lymphedema, but managing it can control swelling and help

patients maintain independence. Dr. Marks and Certified Wound Care Nurse Carla Miller came up with a plan for Timicki. A nurse at the WHS Wound and Skin Healing Center and Hyperbaric Medicine and a home health nurse would wrap her legs regularly with compression wraps. Timicki would elevate her legs at home to reduce swelling, care for her skin to prevent wounds from developing, exercise and follow a low-sodium diet.

“From the moment I walked in the door at the WHS Wound and Skin Healing Center and Hyperbaric Medicine, Dr. Marks and his team never gave up on me,” Timicki says. “They gave me hope.”

Slowly, the treatment began to work. It really took off from March to June 2017, when, with a referral from Dr. Marks, Timicki saw a lymphedema specialist weekly at the UPMC Centers for Rehab Services in Washington County. This past summer, Timicki entered the maintenance phase of treatment.

### THE JOURNEY CONTINUES

“Timicki is a changed person,” Dr. Marks says. “She has lost more than 35 pounds since starting her personalized lymphedema therapy. She can stand and walk. Her legs are wound-free. The maintenance phase is for life, so I’ll see her several times a year as her wound care physician, but, more importantly, her wellness coach.”

Having already come a long way from her lowest point, Timicki, now 51, is focused on slow and steady improvement. She diligently follows a daily routine of wearing compression socks and wraps, as well as elevating and massaging her legs. She is able to do her own shopping again. To her delight, she’s able to wear her ballet flats again.

“I see myself one day getting back to the Wilfred R. Cameron Wellness Center for my workouts,” Timicki says. “I refuse to use my walker now because I wouldn’t use it when I was at my worst. I wouldn’t have gotten this far without the team I had. Even when I didn’t realize it, the faith, hope and support of family, friends, neighbors, physicians, the lymphedema specialist and the home health care teams gave me the fortitude to press on.”

» IF YOU HAVE A CHRONIC WOUND THAT’S PLACING LIMITS ON YOUR LIFE, THE TEAM AT THE WHS WOUND AND SKIN HEALING CENTER AND HYPERBARIC MEDICINE CAN HELP. TO SCHEDULE AN APPOINTMENT, CALL (724) 223-6903.



## HOPE THROUGH HEALING

Chronic wounds cause problems that are more than skin deep. For the millions of Americans who live with them, they can affect nearly every aspect of life. Long-term wounds can make it difficult to work, play, exercise, maintain relationships and live independently. They can cause physical discomfort as well as emotional distress. Fortunately, specialized treatment centers such as the Washington Health System Wound and Skin Healing Center and Hyperbaric Medicine have a wide range of options to help patients heal.

The team at WHS treats a variety of wounds and related conditions that haven’t improved with traditional therapies, including:

- » amputation wounds
- » arterial and venous ulcers
- » burns, skin disorders and infections
- » chronic venous stasis disease
- » compromised skin grafts and flaps
- » diabetic ulcers
- » lymphedema
- » osteomyelitis
- » peripheral vascular disease
- » pressure ulcers
- » surgical wounds
- » traumatic wounds
- » wounds that haven’t improved after three to four weeks of conventional treatment

Our wound healing providers use debridement, orthotics, biologic skin substitutes, negative pressure therapy and hyperbaric oxygen therapy, among other treatments, to get wounds to heal. Another important service they provide is education. Learning how to care for wounds at home gives patients confidence—and sets them up for a future of healing and prevention.