

LOOK NORTH

A community and wellness publication from South Shore University Hospital

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**South Shore
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"I got a hip replacement at age 25"

Gabrielle Barnes was born with a bad hip. After a lifetime of battling chronic pain, she finally found a solution.

Gabrielle Barnes is a people person. At the nursing home where she works, she's known for going out of her way for "her" residents — the patients who live at the home. As a unit clerk, she sets up appointments, leads facility tours and helps out wherever she is needed. Her duties mean she spends a lot of time on her feet.

"I have to walk around the whole building most of the day," she said. "It was really hard for me to do all that moving around without my hip really hurting."

Barnes was born with a congenitally dislocated hip, a problem that wasn't properly diagnosed until she was 12 years old. With treatment delayed, her hip joint and leg bones couldn't develop normally, leading to walking issues and chronic pain. Doctors had tried to correct the problem surgically, cutting the bones of her pelvis and thigh and using plates and screws to try to reorient them, but the attempt was only a partial success.

"I couldn't even go a block without having to take a break," Barnes said. "If I was walking with other people, I knew I'd be slowing them down because I'd have to stop and rest."

By her early twenties, Barnes was feeling stuck. She was in near-constant pain, but she wasn't sure there was a solution. The last few orthopedists she'd seen had told her that nothing more could be done for her. But then a colleague recommended she see Keith Reinhardt, MD, an orthopedic surgeon and chief of the Institute for Joint Replacement at South Shore University Hospital (SSUH). That meeting felt different, she said. Dr. Reinhardt listened to her concerns, answered all her questions — and told her there was hope.

"When you have this kind of congenital problem that isn't addressed early, it affects the development of all the structures involved with walking,"

Dr. Reinhardt said. "The hip joint is a ball and socket joint, with the femoral head, or the ball, fitting into the acetabulum — the hip socket. One cannot develop properly without the other, so the joint becomes malformed and underdeveloped, and the leg on the dislocated side can be much shorter than the other leg. Abnormal forces wear on the cartilage and the joint breaks down at a young age."

"I think I've walked more since the surgery than I have in the past 25 years of my life. I'm amazed at the results."

— Gabrielle Barnes

At first, Barnes was hesitant to undergo another surgery, so Dr. Reinhardt attempted to treat the issue medically to buy her more time. But ultimately, he said, she would need a hip replacement if she wanted to feel better and move more easily.

"I'll admit I panicked a little bit," Barnes said. "I work in a facility where I see patients who have had these procedures every day. I'm only 25 — how can I have a hip replacement? But Dr. Reinhardt walked me through what they were going to do and explained how it would help."

In August 2020, Barnes underwent surgery to remove the old hardware in her hip and create a new hip socket. It was a more complex

procedure than a typical hip replacement, Dr. Reinhardt said. But, using special implants, he was able to reconstruct her hip and femur to ensure she would be better supported when she walked.

"The technology has now advanced to the point that we can alter the anatomy to normalize the orientation of the hip, and even lengthen the leg to help equalize leg lengths," he said. "That's important, not only to help her walk better but also to help alleviate her chronic pain and reduce the risk of secondary effects on her spine."

Recovery from the procedure was much easier than Barnes had anticipated, and the physical therapy team at SSUH helped her regain much-needed strength in her leg muscles. Now, walking is no longer a burden, and she's able to do even more for her patients. It is, she said, an incredible turnaround.

"I think I've walked more since the surgery than I have in the past 25 years of my life. I'm amazed at the results," Barnes said.

Once COVID is in the rearview, Barnes looks forward to going out dancing with her friends and putting her new hip to the test.

To learn more about the Institute for Joint Replacement at South Shore University Hospital, call (631) 647-3800 or visit ssuh.northwell.edu/orthopedics.