



## Overcoming Obstacles

BY GREG HART • PHOTOGRAPHY BY TAMARA LACKEY

Sarah Hart learned how to overcome obstacles through courage and determination at an early age. At the age of 12, she was diagnosed with scoliosis (*curvature of the spine*). Despite aggressive treatment through her adolescence, including a body brace and electronic stimulation, her curvature increased to 70 degrees in her upper back and 55 degrees in her lower back over a 15-year period. This did not stop Sarah in her efforts to become one of the fastest female swimmers in the world. Sarah's passion to live an active and healthy lifestyle at an early age gave her the ability to live a normal life. She did not let a potentially debilitating disease stop her; instead, she learned to fight against the odds.

Another challenge came her way at UNC-Chapel Hill in the fall of 1990. She had an accident in her dorm room resulting in a compound fracture of her right elbow. She immediately went into surgery, where surgeons placed a metal plate with two screws in her arm to hold the bones together. Many people thought that her swimming career was over, yet six months later she qualified for the NCAA Championship and less than one year later became a United States national champion. Sarah has always been able to turn a stumbling block into a stepping stone.

In 1998, Sarah married her longtime college friend and training partner and moved to the Lake Norman area. One year later, she ran her first marathon in Charlotte. In the year 2000, she and her husband were ready to have children but wanted to make sure her body was physically capable of bearing children without complication. It was not. The physicians at the Miller Orthopaedic Clinic (now OrthoCarolina) in Charlotte were amazed at her accomplishments, noting that many people in her condition would be wheelchair bound. Fortunately, with all of the athletic training she had done over the years, her muscular physique helped to compensate for the defects in her spine. At this point, Sarah and her husband decided on spinal fusion surgery. After a removal of five discs and one and a half ribs, her spine is now held together with two 12-inch titanium rods, eleven screws, and several wires. Her recovery was quick since she was in good



physical health prior to the surgery and because she remained positive through the challenging times. In May 2001, she gave birth to a beautiful and healthy baby girl, Marissa. Soon after, in November 2002, she gave birth to her second beautiful and healthy baby girl, Morgan.

After diving into motherhood full throttle and eventually getting the hang of it, she decided to start competing again and in 2005 competed in the Charlotte Run for Your Life Grand Prix running series, placing fifth in the overall female division. This year, she has taken up triathlons and is competing as an elite female in the North Carolina Triathlon Series.

Sarah continually strives to improve in every aspect of her life. She loves to challenge herself, whether it's improving on last year's time or simply running the next mile faster than the last.

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The long swim, bike, and run training sessions allow her to organize her thoughts and help her to achieve that balance in life between being a mother of 2 children, a dedicated wife, a role model for living a healthy lifestyle, a business owner, and one of the top female athletes in the area.

Sarah is now living her dream by developing her own company, UpGrade Lifestyle, Inc., which focuses on motivating individuals and families to live a consistently healthy lifestyle through proper fitness and nutrition programs. She has proven to

friends, family, and the community that with focus and determination, it is possible to live a satisfying life. Many people believe they don't have time to exercise without sacrificing work or family time. This just isn't so. To truly accomplish a balanced lifestyle, one must simply approach each day with a healthy mind and body. In doing so, an amazing transformation occurs throughout all areas of your life. Suddenly you have more energy, more focus, more time for family, a clearer mind throughout the day, and, most importantly, a healthier body.

## Sarah Hart

**Birth date/sign**...October 26/Scorpio

**Resides**...Huntersville, NC

**Hometown**...Bristol, Rhode Island

**Ranking in the family**...Youngest of five

**Education**...BA in Psychology, UNC Chapel Hill; Professional Certified Personal Trainer, NESTA

**Occupation**...Mom, Business Owner (UpGrade Lifestyle, Inc.)

**Started swimming**...When I was 5

**Started running**...When I was 28

**Started cycling**...When I was 32

**Best race experience**...**Past:** Winning United States Nationals title in swimming; **Recent:** Breaking 20:00 in 5k

**Most focused race**...Running a relay with my husband in the 2005 Charlotte Thunder Road Marathon

**Most motivating experience**...Watching and cheering for the participants (including my husband) in the 2006 White Lake Half Ironman

**Favorite workout**...Swim-Bike-Run Combo for about 2 hours

**Favorite place to train**...Huntersville Family Fitness & Aquatics (HFFA)

**Favorite energy bar**...Chocolate Power Bar; Toffee Chocolate Chip Power Bar Harvest

**Favorite drink(s)**...H2O, Coffee, Cabernet, Sam Adams Light

**Favorite foods**...Wheat Bread, bananas & cantaloupe, eggs, grilled chicken & fish & filet, baked potatoes, popcorn, yogurt, light chocolate ice cream, etc.

**Favorite time of day**...Early morning, sunrise

**Favorite types of music**...Jazz, American Standards, Classical

**Most challenging time**...Post surgery (spinal fusion)

**Most amazing experience**...Giving birth to my two girls

**Role Model(s)**...My mom and dad



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GETTING STARTED

# Get Moving

BY SARAH HART

Complete the "Get Moving" Questionnaire  
In each question, circle the answer that best applies to you:

Are you ready to improve your health?	YES	NO
Are you ready to improve your relationships?	YES	NO
Are you ready to increase your energy levels?	YES	NO
Are you ready to work more efficiently?	YES	NO
Are you ready to have more quality sleep?	YES	NO
Are you ready to physically challenge yourself?	YES	NO
Are you ready to mentally challenge yourself?	YES	NO

If you answered YES to these questions, then it's time for you to get moving!

### Things to Know Before You Start

Moving from a sedentary to an active lifestyle affects all areas of your life. Find an event you would like to do. Ask for professional guidance to ensure success before you start training. It's not just about exercising. You must have a well-balanced nutrition plan, as well. In addition, you must have discipline, determination, and desire to achieve your goal.

There is plenty of time in the week to balance work, family, friends, and fitness if you devise a schedule that works specifically for you. Your heart, muscles, joints, and mind will all benefit greatly from a well-designed fitness and nutrition program.

Fortunately, in the Carolinas, there are a wide variety of events to choose from; for example, cycling, running, and swimming events take place locally throughout the year. (Check the back of this issue or go online to [endurancemag.com](http://endurancemag.com) to get a thorough listing of events in your region.)

These events are fun and festive, as well as an opportunity to meet new people. It is also a good feeling to support a worthy cause with your entry fee.

### How to Get Started

- Consult with your physician to make sure that you are medically clear to start a program.
- Find a certified personal trainer or lifestyle coach who will teach you how to succeed in creating a healthier lifestyle.
- Look at your weekly schedule for the next few months.
- Choose an event that gives you from 6 to 16 weeks to train (the amount of time depends on your current fitness

level and the type of event chosen).

- Create 3–5 blocks of time during the week for 20–60 minute training sessions. You may even train every other day to give your body adequate time to recover.

### While Training

- Be prepared to stretch daily.

**THERE IS PLENTY OF TIME IN THE WEEK TO BALANCE WORK, FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND FITNESS IF YOU DEVISE A SCHEDULE THAT WORKS SPECIFICALLY FOR YOU.**

- Drink water throughout the day to stay hydrated. Eat high-quality carbohydrates like whole grains, fruits, and vegetables. Aim for lean meats and low-fat dairy as protein sources. Include fats like olive oil and nuts. Find a nutrition bar that you enjoy as a healthy, quick energy source before training and races.
- Reward yourself with a massage when your body

and mind need a boost.

- Be sure to surround yourself with positive and supportive people.
- Have fun and enjoy the journey.

When you achieve your goal, you will inspire others and you will empower yourself to continue living a healthy lifestyle.

Sarah Hart, owner of Upgrade Lifestyle, Inc., resides in Huntersville, NC, with her husband and two daughters. A U.S. national swimming champion, she recently broke the 20-minute barrier in the 5K. You can contact Sarah at [sarahhart2@bellsouth.net](mailto:sarahhart2@bellsouth.net).



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PHOTOGRAPHY



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## AND THE SURVEY SAYS...

UNC Orthopaedics is conducting a study via a survey on common injuries in triathletes. As a result of this study, we hope to guide strategies to minimize injury and improve training regimens. UNC Orthopaedics welcomes triathletes of all levels to participate. To learn more or to participate in the survey, please visit:

[www.med.unc.edu/ortho/tristudy/tristudyinfo.html](http://www.med.unc.edu/ortho/tristudy/tristudyinfo.html)

919.962.6637 (appointments)