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## ‘I overcame cancer to be a drag racer’

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Drag racing, powerlifting, marathons. More women are embracing physical challenges in midlife and loving it, as Elli Jacobs finds out.

By Elli Jacobs

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“I went from couch lover to marathon runner”

Andrea Doney, 50, ran her first full marathon last year as a way to overcome emotional trauma.



Andrea Doney, 50.

“I’ve always preferred the couch and daytime television to any sporting activity. I actually used to pretend to be sick to get out of the athletics carnival at school.

But when we moved to Perth in 2011, I was raising two young children and overcoming post-traumatic stress around my husband's health, our prolonged battle with infertility, two friends passing away from cancer, a tenuous pregnancy, and a very premature birth. In a new city with no friends, I needed an outlet for my growing anxiety.

My husband has always been a runner, so he encouraged me to give it a go. My early five-kilometre runs were physically hard, but almost straight away I discovered it was an unbeatable way to unravel the tangled knots in my head. I always loved who I was after a run – calmer, happier and more patient.

From there the distances grew as I realised how accomplished each morning run made me feel. There's something about running at sunrise that allowed me to connect with myself and the

world in almost a spiritual way, and it became my “me time”. It’s given me pride in myself, and that’s a rare and amazing thing.

As my strength and endurance grew, I began taking part in 21-kilometre half-marathons. After about a dozen, at the age of 49, I started wondering if I could do a full marathon.

I trained over four months, with two or three shorter weekday runs, one long weekend run, including strength work twice a week, until I was running about 30 kilometres fairly comfortably.



“I spent most of my life thinking that I could never run a marathon. I will now spend the rest of my life knowing that I did.”

In April 2021, I ran my first full marathon in Canberra. I had no illusions about how hard the race would be, and the physical toll it would take, and I was right. It was long and painful, but the feeling when I crossed that finish line was utterly unforgettable. I spent most of my life thinking that I could never run a marathon. I will now spend the rest of my life knowing that I did.

I ultimately decided to qualify as a running coach specialising in slower, older, bigger and injured runners in a sector that frequently discusses running in terms of speed, physicality and strength.

**The Slow Coach** [her online running forum] **encourages anyone to overcome the intimidation of taking up long-distance running, as it's about mindset, training and consistency and not only about what your body looks like.**

My physique isn't in any way what the mainstream would view runners to look like. I have a mummy tummy, I'm a bit bigger, and I wear thick glasses, but my running

accomplishments have given me the confidence to stop caring about how I look and worrying what others think, and that's because of my very visceral understanding that my imperfect body is still capable of some quite remarkable things. I feel running has given me a celebration of what imperfection can do and that's been liberating."