

# Lupus

## Toni Grimes

**At least 1.5 million Americans have lupus. It can take months, and sometimes years, before a health care team can find the right combination of medicines to keep a person's lupus symptoms under control.**

**— Lupus Foundation**

It takes a lot of courage to risk one's life defending your country. That's what Major Toni Grimes signed up for in 1991. Toni enlisted in the U.S. Army and began a nearly two-decade career that was cut short—not by any combat wounds but by lupus, a chronic disease that attacks the immune system, making it incapable of distinguishing healthy tissue from viruses, bacteria, and germs.

In 2003, while serving in South Korea, Toni began suffering from lower abdominal pain. Three years later, Toni experienced trouble breathing, blurry vision, and unusual swelling in her face and eye sockets. Following countless ER and doctors' visits and various drug regimens, a confirmed diagnosis came in February 2007 when exhaustive blood tests confirmed Toni had lupus.

Toni vowed to fight lupus as bravely as she defended her country. With no FDA-approved treatments to halt the progression of lupus, Toni soldiered on through a deployment to Afghanistan, controlling her symptoms as best she could. But, the incredible stress and physical demands were taking their toll on Toni's kidneys. She tried immunosuppressant drug therapies and monthly chemotherapy treatments to reverse her kidney disease—to no avail.

After returning stateside, Toni's health continued to deteriorate. In 2010, after prolonged hospitalization, numerous chemotherapy infusions and drug regimens, and weekly physical therapy, Toni won back her own life, but was compelled to retire from military service after 19 years, 2 months, and 29 days. Today, Toni lives in Phoenix, where she serves as a vocal advocate for veterans and people living with lupus.

Toni courageously declares, "Lupus does not define me; it's just a character trait." Nevertheless, she can't help wondering what a different course her career would have taken if a definitive diagnosis had come sooner and there were treatments that could have stopped lupus from nearly overcoming her body.

For the last 50 years, Toni and approximately 1.5 million Americans living with lupus have had treatments to address symptoms only—not the disease itself. In 2011, FDA approved the first lupus therapy to treat a subset of the patient population. While hope may be on the horizon, many people living with lupus wonder why more therapies are not being developed to combat this disease and look for ways to further research and drug discovery.

Source: [www.lupus.org/webmodules/webarticlesnet/templates/new\\_learnunderstanding.aspx?articleid=2232&zzoneid=523](http://www.lupus.org/webmodules/webarticlesnet/templates/new_learnunderstanding.aspx?articleid=2232&zzoneid=523)