

Your Well-Being

How Prosthetic Arms Empower Active Lives

By Sherri Edge and Amber Henson, Arm Dynamics



Photos courtesy of Arm Dynamics

Meet Abram Nichols, a stay-at-home dad to Caydence (5) and Elias (3). Their home vibrates with laughter and fun, and recently the excitement of welcoming a new baby sister. That's a lot of littles to manage, and Abram pulls it off with a smile and the support of two prosthetic limbs.

"In our family, Mom is the full-time breadwinner and Dad has the privilege of staying home with the kids," he said. "I get to see all their firsts and teach them how to live life and help others. They're old enough now to notice how my arm and leg are different, and they want to help me. That just does a dad proud."

When Abram was 17, a tumor in his foot caused the amputation of his left leg below the knee. Nine years later, a tumor formed in his left hand, and it had to be amputated. But with the help of his prosthetics team at Arm Dynamics, and his wife, Katie, Abram is empowered to be a husband and dad who can do almost anything. "I take the dogs and kids on walks, and I've mastered buckling their car seats," he said. "I do all the meal prep for our family, and my TASKA hand makes it a lot easier to hang on to things. It helps me with groceries. I loop all the bags on my arm, turn off the sensor so it won't open, and carry everything into the house in one trip. And my right hand is free so I can wrangle the kids."



Abram recently upgraded from a body-powered arm to a myoelectric with a "super comfortable" silicone socket. Caydence said, "Dad's robot hand is so cool!" She and Elias take turns pushing the buttons on the back of the hand to change grip patterns.

"The emotional impact of my new prosthesis is life changing. It makes my daily routines a lot easier. For lack of a better word, I feel 'normal.' When I look down, there's a hand, not a hook. It might seem like a small thing, but I use my hands when I talk, and when I walk it balances out my left side."

While Abram's prostheses help him to wrangle his little ones, other people with limb differences are empowered by carving out time to take care of their physical and mental health. Claudia Castellanos is a great example. She's happiest when she's with her 12-year-old son, Alexavier, playing basketball and riding bikes. "But something I really wanted to be able to do for myself was get back into weight training."

Claudia was injured on the job, and her left arm was severed a few inches below her shoulder. Later, she returned to the same company full time. At work she uses a myoelectric arm, and she has an activity-specific device for the gym.

One of her goals was to be able to do a regular workout, including weights. "I told my prosthetic team that was a big part of my life and something I wanted to get back to for me," she said.

Claudia worked with her team at Arm Dynamics to come up with an activity-specific prosthesis that has allowed her to achieve her goals. Bonus: She can put it on by herself. "It's important to me to be independent," she said. "I don't like to rely on other people. So being able to put this on easily, by myself, was a big plus."

Her recommendation for people with a limb difference who are looking to work out: a personal trainer. She said



the trick is to find one who doesn't see limb differences as limiting.

"My trainer says, 'Well, let's try this.' If it doesn't work, if it hurts or my form is off, he'll suggest a different approach."

There are times when Claudia assumes she won't be able to do a specific type of workout because of her amputation and she doesn't want to try.

"He always makes me try," she said. "I do much better with a trainer. He won't let my difference be an excuse."

Claudia sought help from her prosthetics team and her personal trainer to make sure the important things in her life could still be part of her routine. "My daily workout has helped me with my mood and self-confidence. After my amputation I was down on myself, but this has gotten me back up."

While living two different experiences of limb loss, Claudia and Abram have discovered that accepting help may be one of the best ways to find independence and feel empowered.

