


RACHEL MĀIA

-  Whanganui
-  April 2, 1983
-  Below knee amputee
-  Para climbing

Grassroots:

Kia ora tātou, my name is Rachel Māia.

I grew up in Dunedin, Auckland, Gore, Invercargill and a caravan park in Christchurch for a short while where there were lots of ducklings. I live in Whanganui now where there is no climbing wall!

Growing up I wanted to be a public speaker and a landscape architect! I liked writing poems, stories, and loved arts and crafts. I also liked hiding under the garage in a little dug out part under the foundations of the house and pretending I was an explorer.

A favourite childhood memory is getting stuck climbing trees at school and sliding down the street using Mum's roasting dish on snow days.

My journey as a Para athlete:

When I was 16, I had a climbing accident that broke both my ankles. Some of my hip bone and lots of metal was grafted into one ankle to try and fix it. I had to go back to high school in a wheelchair with two legs in plaster which sucked, and I got teased a lot. 9 surgeries and 20 years later I chose to amputate one leg because I could not use it.



“With a little self-belief, you can go beyond what you can see.”

RACHEL MĀIA

I started Para climbing as an adult in 2017 to try and find a better way to approach coping with pain and my disability.

My first time representing New Zealand was in 2018 at a World Championships. I was straight into it with no team or coach, all the way over in Austria on my own in a wheelchair, it was pretty scary. But it was the first time any Para athlete had competed internationally for New Zealand in climbing which was very exciting. I learned if you just keep doing the next best thing and take it one step at a time you can get there. I now have a bronze and a silver medal, three Halberg nominations and I will keep trying for Gold!

There is no climbing wall in my city, so I mostly train in my garage at home climbing sideways back and forth around the shed on a low wall. And I hang by just my fingertips above the doorframe with weights on my harness. I have to work harder on strength because I don't get to practice climbing as much as other athletes. I practice calm breathing because I am scared of heights. I have no coach or team in New Zealand so I have to be determined to keep pushing myself on my own and not give up.

My advice if you have a dream of representing New Zealand is to remember to have fun. It shouldn't all be hard work. If it stops being fun, it's important to go back to just being present in the moment.

Fun facts:

- **When I get nervous in front of the cameras and crowds while competing and everyone is looking at me, I poke my tongue out at the cameras, so now there are a lot of very silly climbing photos in the news of me with my tongue poking out!**
- **My hype song when I am waiting for my turn is "Lose yourself" by Eminem. But you do not want to hear me try and sing it!**
- **My favourite place to travel is Austria because there is a gondola that will take me to the top of a mountain, which I can't walk up. I can be high above the clouds. This mountain is where I decided to amputate my leg.**
- **My favourite movie is a short film called "Stumped" about my Para climbing friend Mo Beck, from America. She makes up lots of funny stories when people ask "how did you lose your arm?"**

