

We'll get through this together

Tips for family and friends of someone living with MS

Living with multiple sclerosis (MS) can be challenging for the person with the diagnosis. But MS can also be difficult for family and friends. They may want to be helpful and supportive, but may not understand how best to do that.

Here are some ideas for you and your family and friends to consider.

If you are living with MS:



Talk about your diagnosis. Whether it's with your spouse, a friend, or your kids, talking about your MS may help them understand what's going on and what to expect. They need to know that MS does not change who you are and that you are still the same person they love.



Welcome assistance. People in your life will want to help you, so let them. It may help those who care about you to feel like they are contributing in a positive way. Who doesn't need a little help?



Let your family and friends know you appreciate them. It's human nature to want to be acknowledged for doing something good or working hard. When you tell someone how much you appreciate their efforts and that you are grateful they are in your life, you can make their day.



Be open and honest. Family and friends may not understand how symptoms are affecting you. Tell them how you are feeling and don't be afraid of disappointing them. If you don't feel up to doing something, sharing how you are feeling may help them understand.



Be clear about your needs. Direct communication will help your family and friends understand what you actually need. They'll appreciate not having to guess.

If you are a family member or a friend:



Listen. Living with a serious disease can be distressing. And sometimes people just want a sympathetic, non-judgmental ear to talk to. They may want feedback or they may just want to vent.



Ask questions. “How are you feeling?” “What’s on your mind?” “Do you need anything?” At first glance, questions like these may not seem that impactful. But someone living with MS may really appreciate your interest and thoughtfulness. And it can give them the chance to open up and talk honestly with someone they trust.



Offer to help. Whether it’s out of pride or not wanting to inconvenience others, sometimes people living with MS won’t ask for help even if they need it. Consider making it part of your regular routine to ask your loved one if there is anything you can do to help them.



Be supportive. Foster positivity. Crack jokes. Laugh. Offer up a hug. Treat the person living with MS as you always have. When someone is facing a serious disease, they might worry that it will affect their identity or that people will treat them differently because of the disease. Being supportive and positive can lift their spirits and remind them they are still the same person you have always loved.



Take care of yourself. When helping to care for someone with a serious disease, it’s natural to put their needs above your own. But it’s important to remember that you need to take care of your physical and emotional well-being, too. It’s OK to schedule time to go to the gym, go out with friends, or just have some alone time to recharge.