An MSer’s Review of MS Buddy

by ABIGAIL BUDD

A Look at the MS Buddy App from Healthline

I was asked to try a new app for multiple sclerosis (MS) called MS Buddy and have been using it enthusiastically for a couple of weeks.

It was developed by Healthline and the terms of service state, "MS Buddy is a free resource for the MS community to share and connect with others like you and exchange insights."

It stresses that MS Buddy isn’t a medical app and that it doesn’t endorse or recommend any particular medical treatment or provider, nor should it be used for advice. It is a platform to be matched with other MSers with similar symptoms and experiences.

How Does it Work?

First, you need to download MS Buddy from the app store. It’s free to download and was easy to install on my phone. Then, you need to create a profile — this is important as you will be matched with people depending on the answers you provide.

The profile questions include your age, marital status, whether you have children, the type of MS you have, and what medication you’ve tried. You don’t need to reveal too much personal information about yourself, just first name, surname initial, year you were born, and your state or country.

You can include a picture if you want but this isn’t essential. It all felt relaxed and informal and I loved the way you’re not connected to a larger profile like Facebook groups or conversations on Twitter. It feels more anonymous and is like a snapshot of MSers.

You’re then invited to create an icebreaker question which appears when you’re matched with someone. My first one was asking how people manage exercise, as I find this so difficult with my lack of mobility. I was prompted to change or update my ice breaker question after a week or so and I found this useful. It prevented me getting bored and changed the kind of responses I got. The second question asked: if people work and what support they get?

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After you’ve registered and set up your profile, you wait to be matched with someone and it’s that simple.

What Happens When You Match With Someone?

I get a notification every day that I’ve got a new "Buddy" and their profile appears on my phone so I know a little

bit about them. I can them send a message, usually responding to their icebreaker question, and we start talking.

Conversations are varied depending on what we talk about and sometimes it doesn't go further than a brief exchange, but I've also had long conversations going on for a few days!

Apparently, MS Buddy weighs the following factors when matching: MS Type, number of years with MS, similar age, marital status, and parenting status. In my opinion, this is why the app works.

I don't have time to talk to people about relapses that I don't have anymore, for example. And I'd rather talk to people who've had MS for a while than people going through the turmoil of diagnosis. This sounds harsh but we all have such busy lives and it's refreshing not to have to ask all the questions myself when connecting with people.

I wish this app had been around when I was first diagnosed, as I was embarrassed by it and didn't want people to know. MS Buddy provides a private place where you can talk freely and is less overwhelming that Facebook groups or open Twitter conversations.

I've found I don't always respond to everyone I'm matched with and this is more to do with what else is going on that day than the individual. I've also found that I instigate most of the conversations and was told this is due to people being shy and not feeling confident enough to respond.

This is another reason the app works; it's so easy to reach out to similar MSers and I don't feel pressure to start conversations if I'm busy or have other things to do. There are lots of isolated people out there and this app is a lifeline, providing a new contact every day.

I also like the way it's easy to block people if they start to become a nuisance! I've had nothing but pleasant exchanges with lovely people but I can see how conversations could get difficult and there is a possibility for misunderstandings or disagreements.

There's a large "block" button at the top of the screen so you can easily stop any unwanted attention. There's also a link to give feedback and report anything you don't like or would like to see improved, which is encouraging.

I'm told by Healthline that MS Buddy is available around the world with 82 percent of its current users from US. There are also users from Canada, UK, Australia, and various countries in Asia. This is another selling point as I find it so interesting comparing health care for chronic conditions around the world.

Anyway, I have a new match so I'll leave you to download it and I might see you there!