Understanding MS Relapses: Triggers and Treatment

by ERICA WILSON

Coping With MS Relapses

When traveling the journey that is multiple sclerosis (MS), if you are diagnosed with relapsing-remitting multiple sclerosis (RRMS) a relapse is almost inevitable. You know the signs, the elevated body temperature that leads to exaggerated numbness, tingling, foot drop, spasticity (when that leg refuses to obey).

You deny it at first, but you know what's next. A call to your doctor confirms what you already know to be true, so begins the treatment.

The Solu-Medrol Fix

You make the trip to the infusion center and prepare for the "little stick" of the needle that will flood your body with huge amounts of steroid. One thing I do not look forward to is the metallic taste that emerges within minutes of the first drips.

Following are some tips that I have found helpful to get through the infusion:

- Cranberry juice or peppermint candy help with the metallic taste.
- Bring a book or a tablet with downloaded books.
- If you have games on your cell phone, this helps to pass the time.
- Usually, there is a television in the room, so I overdose on HGTV.

Does Solu-Medrol Work?

My very first solu-medrol treatment last year went quite well. There was a recliner, and the nurse brought me warm blankets. The metallic taste was the only side effect. I had just been diagnosed, so it was for what they referred to as my first relapse.

The numbness I had in my legs remained, but I was able to walk a little better, though I still had to use my cane.

What Triggers Your Relapse?

In the last year since my diagnosis (first relapse), I feel like I have experienced an eternal relapse. The numbness has never gone away. When I say numbness, I can feel, but I can't tell. What I mean by that is I can feel pressure or that I am being touched, but I can't tell what is touching me.

I don't feel pain or tickles on my feet, but I can feel you touching them. It is a strange feeling and numbness is the best description. I have noticed, though those particular things make the numbness more obvious.

- Fever, even low grade

- Infection (urinary tract infection is common, strep throat, etc.)
- Overdoing it physically
- Lack of sleep or rest
- Stress

How to Manage Your MS Relapse Triggers

To prevent a relapse, you will need to keep an eye out for your triggers. This can include keeping your body's temperature down, prevent infections before it happens, trying not to overdo it, getting enough rest, and practicing stress relief techniques.

Fevers

I keep a digital thermometer beside my bed, so I can keep tabs on my temperature. My average body temperature is 97.3 degrees fahrenheit.

Once it reaches 98 or above, I can feel it. I monitor it and will take a fever reducer if it continues to climb. I have not figured out what causes my fevers.

Infections

Recently I have noticed that I don't know when I need to urinate until it's almost too late. Because bladder issues are common among MSers, urinary tract infections (UTI) can happen often. This is a tough one to manage because if you are like me, I can no longer 'pee on command.' Drink lots of water to help trigger the bladder response.

Overdoing It Physically

On days when you feel great, still take it easy. We have to be careful how we spend our energy. Pick a few tasks that need to be done for the day and make a list.

No matter how good you feel, be sure to stop when the list is fulfilled. This will help conserve your energy, and you won't have to pay for it later.

Lack of Sleep or Rest

Sometimes we have no control over sleep. There are nights when I can fall right to sleep and stay asleep all night.

On the remaining 28 days of the month, I take a 3mg tablet of melatonin (always check with your physician before you take anything new). I typically take this medication about an hour before I want to fall asleep, and I usually get a decent night's sleep (unless, of course, one of my children calls me).

Stress

This one is huge and difficult to manage, and I know stress is a big trigger for me.

Things that never bothered me before my diagnosis, now seem to be big hurdles for me.I have had to retrain my thought processes. In the past, I could go for a run and relieve any stress that had found its way into my world.

Now that I can no longer run, I look for different ways to find relief. There are stretches specifically designed for MS that help tremendously. You can find a plethora of activities on YouTube, including yoga. Check your local MS resource for classes you may find helpful. Some of them require a doctor's release before you can participate.

On this journey, it is a good idea to surround yourself with friends and/or family that can help you. It can be difficult to explain what you are going through with someone who doesn't have this disease, but sometimes just

having someone there sharing space is all you need.