Madeleine Stowe Encourages MS Caregivers to Pursue Passions

by AMANDA BEST

Being There for Someone with Multiple Sclerosis

One of the most important things a caregiver can do for a loved one with multiple sclerosis (MS) is to continue to pursue their own passions, according to actress Madeleine Stowe.

Ms. Stowe, who is known for her roles in TV's *Revenge* and films like *12 Monkeys* and *We Were Soldiers*, cared for her father as he battled MS. She slipped into the caregiver role early, helping her mother to look after her father from when she was a little girl up until his death in her 20s.

Caring for someone with MS, though it is a labor of love, can be physically and emotionally draining. Continuing to make time for your interests and hobbies will help, says Ms. Stowe.

"Find the things you are very passionate about," she told NewLifeOutlook.

"For me, as a child, that was playing piano. Playing piano got me through my father's more difficult times because I felt a sense of direction."

Taking this time for yourself will also keep you from burning out.

"It allows you to really be there when you're needed and it makes you stronger in many ways to support your loved ones," says Ms. Stowe.

Support, Not Pity

That support is hugely important for a person living with MS, like working mother-of-one Teri Evitts. Ms. Evitts was diagnosed with MS at age 21, when she was a senior in college, and she says it turned her life upside down.

The love and support of her husband, mother, close friends and church family has been invaluable.

"They have been the people in the trenches with me."

But while support from friends and family is helpful, pity is not, she says.

Tips For Supporting Someone With MS

Ms. Evitts has a few tips for helping a friend or loved one diagnosed with MS:

- Don't ignore the diagnosis, but also don't incite fear in the person.
- Offer to help, but be okay with it if you're told, 'No thank you.'
- Please, please, please don't say, 'But you don't look sick.'

- Educate yourself about the disease so you don’t have to ask your friend or loved one lots of questions.
- When educating yourself, don’t make suggestions for what the person should be doing (i.e. diet change, herbal supplements etc.). Merely offering encouragement and empathy is extremely soothing.

It’s also wise to know your audience, says Ms. Evitts.

“What to do or say to a newly diagnosed person really depends on the individual. I for one am an introvert. I have a tendency to retreat into myself to reflect and heal and if I’m inundated with visitors it causes me stress. I personally love cards, texts or calls with offers to help – it lets me know that people are aware and are there if and when I need them.”

Ms. Stowe and Ms. Evitts are currently promoting Aubagio, an oral medication for relapsing forms of MS that clinical trials have found to be very effective in preventing relapses and disease progression. The campaign, Lights, Camera, Take Action on MS, includes events around the country which will be attended by Ms. Stowe and will give people with MS an opportunity to share their stories and join in discussions with experts on topics like managing stress and the emotional impact of MS. These events will also be streamed online. People living with MS and their supporters are encouraged to visit TakeActionMS.com and register for an event.