Keeping Positive With MS

by AMANDA BEST

Remain Positive Despite Your MS

Keeping positive after being diagnosed with MS isn’t a walk in the park. Knowing there may come a time when you struggle to walk at all can take a huge toll on your outlook on life, no matter how sunny it once was.

Looking on the bright side throughout the various struggles MS brings isn’t something you can decide to do once and then forget about. It’s a decision you have to make every day, sometimes multiple times a day.

And sometimes, you have to take some time out to have a “pity party” before you can get on with being positive, says Teri Evitts, a working mother living with MS.

“I admit, I get angry at times and feel sorry for myself, especially during a relapse,” she told NewLifeOutlook.

“I attempt to only allow myself to have a pity party for a short amount of time and then move on.”

Keeping positive and optimistic makes you better able to self-advocate, which is important, says Ms. Evitts.

“The advice I would give is to allow yourself to feel sad or mad – it’s completely normal and warranted. But don’t stay there.

“Be mad for a while and use that anger to do something productive.”

‘Educate, educate, educate!’

Ms. Evitts says the unpredictability of MS has been a big challenge.

“When living with MS you don’t know what the future holds in regard to progression or individual symptoms. Initially after diagnosis I wasn’t aware of what could trigger or cause symptoms to worsen.”

Education and learning to listen to her body has helped: “I have learned over the years that stress negatively impacts my health and so I try to reduce stress in my life.”

Neuroligist and MS specialist Dr. Ann Bass agrees that educating oneself and taking control is very important for reducing the impact of this condition on your life, and as a result remaining in good spirits.

“Educate, educate, educate,” she says. “Take control early. You have MS, it does not have you.”

There are so many more resources available now than there were 10 or 15 years ago that it is much easier to learn about your condition and what you can do to improve it, says Dr. Bass.

But no one can do it by themselves.

“Surround yourself with a support group. You should never have to deal with MS alone.”

That support group should include your family, friends, physicians and other people who have MS, she says.

Next page: actress Madeleine Stowe talks about focusing on what MS gives, not what it takes.

Focusing On What MS Gives, Not What It Takes

Though you may be worried about the impact your struggles will have on your family and friends, actress Madeleine Stowe says her father’s MS has made her more compassionate and tenacious.

“Growing up with a father who had MS gave me a particular world view,” she told NewLifeOutlook.

“I never look at it as what MS took from my family; I see it more as what it gave to us.

“I try to imprint on my daughter that it’s an obligation to take care of others. I remind her to look around, be grateful and remember that it’s a moral imperative to help other people. It’s as simple as that.”

Ms. Stowe has plenty of happy memories of her father from her childhood despite the condition he lived with, including being carried around on his shoulders as he danced to ‘Rock Around The Clock’, and his joy during Halloween festivities.

“He loved Halloween, and even as he became more disabled he was most excited when children visited our home to collect candy.”

Ms. Evitts has a five-year-old son, and she says he has responded to her MS with “typical child candor”.

“One night, following a very hot summer day, I was trying to perform a simple task in the kitchen and I repeatedly dropped something.

“I said, ‘I have the dropsies tonight,’ and Liam immediately said, ‘It must be your MS.’ I thought it was incredibly funny and rather intuitive.”

‘No longer a life sentence’

When faced with negative thoughts about your condition and its impacts, it’s key to remember that MS is “no longer a life sentence” says Dr. Bass.

She says people with MS can have a good quality of life thanks to new advancements in treatment, including a new oral medication called Aubagio that she, Ms. Stowe and Ms. Evitts are currently promoting with the campaign Lights, Camera, Take Action on MS

“We have this amazing treatment able to reduce relapse, slow progressions and keep symptoms at a minimum,” Dr. Bass says.

“It really allows patients to continue to work, have babies, have time with family and pursue self interests.”

The campaign 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.

For more tips, read staying optimistic with MS.