

YOU CAN! THE WHYS AND HOWS OF STAYING ACTIVE WHEN YOU HAVE MS

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You've probably heard it before, but let's say it again: **exercise and physical activity are very beneficial for people with MS!**

Here are four reasons **WHY** you should stay active.

1. It helps to keep your world full, busy, productive, fun, and interesting
2. It can improve your MS symptoms, including fatigue, mood changes, cognitive issues, and mobility problems.
3. It helps to manage or prevent other health conditions, including high blood pressure, cholesterol, and diabetes, which are common in people with MS.
4. Because of this, it can help prevent MS from progressing as quickly and help to lengthen your lifespan!

The current recommendation for everyone with MS, regardless of ability level, is 150 minutes of moderate exercise and or physical activity per week.

But let's get real. Even with the best of intentions, you may be challenged by MS symptoms like fatigue, pain, weakness, or depression.

Your motivation may peak one day and crash the next.

You may be confused about what's good for you and your MS and what isn't.

Or you may face challenges related to transportation, finances, or other logistical problems.

So **HOW** can you stay active? Here are five tips.

1. Listen to your body.

Some days are going to be better than others and that's OK. Be patient and give yourself grace. Remind yourself that you can pick it up again tomorrow or the next day.

Talk with your healthcare team to determine the types of physical activity and exercise that are best suited to your needs and abilities.

Try out some new activities. You may discover sports, hobbies, or types of exercise that you'd never thought of before that feel great! (Maybe yoga, recumbent bicycling, kayaking, or swimming).

2. Make use of mobility aids.

Mobility aids are tools – they make life easier, just like any other tool you might use in on a daily basis (like your car, your vacuum, your TV remote).

So identify and utilize mobility aids that help you the most with the things you want to do!

Do you want to travel? There are great motorized scooters that make long days doable. Do you want to go on walks without falling? Canes and walkers assist with balance. Do you want to go on bike rides? Recumbent bicycles can help with your energy and balance! Just talk with your health care team to find out the right tools for you.

One day you may not need any assistance, while the next day a mobility aid can be your best friend. Using mobility aids isn't giving in to your MS, it's taking charge of it!

Plus, it's a service to both yourself and your loved ones. They can share more activities with you and enjoy your company rather than having to worry constantly about your safety.

3. Find or create your best active space.

Staying active requires an environment that is safe and free of obstacles, whether it's your own home, a yoga class, a swimming pool, a local gym, or your neighborhood.

Take time to think about what activities you would like to do and where you can do them comfortably and safely. And remember to use the mobility aid(s) that can help you succeed.

Transportation to and from your favorite activities can be a major obstacle. If driving has become a problem, consider requesting a driving evaluation from an occupational therapist and ask about the use of hand controls in your vehicle.

If driving isn't possible, look for accessible transportation options in your area. You may be able to arrange transportation to a pool or yoga class as well as to your medical appointments.

But if all else fails, remember that online classes are readily available!

5. Ride the ups and downs of motivation.

Everyone's motivation varies from day to day. Here are some tips to help when your motivation is flagging:

Be sure to set reasonable and achievable goals for your exercise and physical activity. Don't bite off more than you can chew – start small and build on your successes.

Create your cheerleading team. We all need people to encourage and support us and, even better, to enjoy activities with. Let folks know how they can best support you.

Pat yourself on the back for your successes and forgive yourself for lapses. The goal is to keep moving forward with the physical activities and exercise that make you feel good!

If you're in a mood slump, pay attention to what's going on. Is it just today, or have you been feeling down and discouraged and/or disinterested in doing much of anything? If it's been going on for a while, it's important to discuss it with your healthcare provider and request a depression screening. The sooner depression is recognized and treated, the sooner you'll feel better about getting out and about.

If you want to try an exercise program that is accessible, adaptable, on-demand in your own home, fun, and accountable, check out MS Moves With Mandy (<http://www.cando-ms.org/moves>)!