



Questions for Women with MS to Ask Their Healthcare Team

Staying informed by talking with your neurologist/multiple sclerosis (MS) healthcare team is an important part of managing your MS. It may also be helpful to find a therapist or counselor that is knowledgeable about MS for discussions that go beyond your medical visits. If you are thinking about planning a family, it's also important to involve your obstetrician/gynecologist (OB/GYN). The goal of these questions is to help you engage in deeper and more meaningful conversations around the topics that are important to you and your future.

We surveyed 1,000 women with MS to uncover their top concerns at the time of diagnosis and compiled the questions they wished they had asked their healthcare team earlier in their diagnosis about work, relationships, and family planning.

Based on the responses to the survey, as well as input from healthcare professionals, below are suggested questions to ask your healthcare providers as early in your MS journey as possible, to facilitate discussions that will set yourself up to better navigate the road ahead.

WORK

Planning for future financial security can be a concern, especially when you are unsure of your work stability. There are many kinds of work you can do while living with MS. Knowing your rights and having the correct information about your symptoms will help better prepare you for broaching the topic with your place of work.

- How might MS affect my ability to work?
- Is my immune system weaker now? Am I more susceptible to getting sick at work?
- How can I minimize the impact of my MS symptoms at work?
- How can I manage my fatigue while working?
- How can I manage cognitive challenges while working?
- When should I tell the people I work with that I have MS?
- What are the most important things to tell my boss about my having MS?
- What is most important for me to tell my colleagues or my direct reports about my having MS?
- If I'm just about to start a new job, how/when should I talk to my new employer about my having MS?
- Where can I find more information about my rights under the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)? When should I discuss these rights with my HR department and/or supervisor?
- What types of accommodations might help me perform optimally on my job?
- What types of accommodations can employers offer to help me work more effectively?
- Might I have to stop working in the future?
- When is it appropriate to begin thinking about applying for Social Security Disability or Supplemental Security Income?
- Are there any resources or groups that can help answer my questions?

Relationships are an area of life where we sometimes appreciate guidance. Navigating the sensitivities of an intimate relationship as well as general family dynamics can be a challenge without the right support. Opening this conversation with your MS nurse, therapist/counselor or general practitioner can help you be better equipped to face these challenges with your partner or future partner.

- What is the best way to approach my significant other/children/family members/friends with the news of my diagnosis?
- How might MS impact my ability to find a partner?
- How might MS impact my ability to be intimate with a partner?
- How might MS affect my sexual feelings or functioning?
- What kinds of contraception are safe for me to use?
- How can I best help my significant other understand the ways in which MS might impact our lives?
- How can I best help my partner understand the ways that MS can affect sexual feelings and functioning?
- Are there any resources or groups that can help answer my questions?

MS is more prevalent among women of childbearing age compared with any other age group, with onset usually between the ages of 20-40. Whether you are ready to start a family now or think it may be in your future, it's important to discuss these questions with your doctor and OB/GYN when you are diagnosed so you can best prepare for your future. Many women go on to have children after an MS diagnosis and are just as likely to conceive as anyone else.

- If I want to get pregnant now/in the very near future, what should I start doing now to plan for that?
- Do I need to consider contraception now more than I did prior to my diagnosis?
- Should I modify my diet before or during pregnancy?
- Are any MS symptoms worsened during pregnancy?
- Are there any symptoms that are not present during pregnancy?
- Will pregnancy make my MS progress faster?
- What should I expect during delivery?
- What should I expect during the post-partum stage?
- What is my risk of having a relapse during the post-partum period?
- Will I have enough energy to be able to care for my new baby and the children I already have?
- What is my child's risk of developing MS?
- Do I have to modify my daily activities or exercise regimen while pregnant?
- How can I facilitate communication between you (neurologist/general practitioner) and my OB/GYN?