

What does it mean to be a *Support Partner?*

Tips for supporting your loved
one while also taking care of yourself

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Learning Objectives

Support partners and their loved ones with MS will be able to:

- List at least 3 types of support one can offer to a person with MS
- Explain why self-care is essential for support partners
- Describe the ways in which aging partners provide care and support for one another
- Explain why planning for unpredictability is essential

***MS is a “we disease”
not a “me disease”***

***Aging is a “we transition”
not a “me transition”***

***When one person in a family
is diagnosed with MS,
the whole family lives with it***

***When one or both partners are aging,
the whole family lives with it***

***Every person's needs matter
– not just the person with MS***

***As partners age, needs may shift often
from one partner to the other***

The Many Faces of Support

- Spouse or partner
- Parent
- Sibling
- Close friend
- Adult child



The Kinds of Support People Offer

- **Emotional support** – in person, by phone, or online
- **Assistance with daily activities** – in the household
- **Hands-on assistance** – with personal care activities
- **Transportation** – and running errands
- **Cheerleading** – as a loved one works to meet goals
- **Paper work** – (bill-paying, paperwork, appointment scheduling, managing finances)

Support may take many forms and evolve over time


Tips for Support Partners

- Educate yourself about MS
 - It's chronic, highly variable and unpredictable
- Learn from your loved one – each person's MS is unique
- Remember that most MS symptoms are invisible – you're only seeing the tip of the iceberg
- Be aware of good days and bad days – sometimes your help will be needed and sometimes not; if you're not sure, ask!
- Don't be over-protective or exclude your partner from planning, decisions, responsibilities
- Pay attention to your own physical and emotional health


Where Does Care For Yourself Fit In?

Good self care is the first step to being an effective support partner

- Your health and well-being are important for both of you
 - Preventive care for you is as important as MS care and preventive care are for your loved one
- Support partners are at risk for depression, anxiety, irritability
- Adequate sleep, exercise, healthy eating, and recreation are essential for your well-being
- Building your own support network is essential:
 - Family
 - Friends
 - Faith community
 - Support groups
 - Voluntary health organizations:
Can Do MS, National MS Society (1-800-344-4867)



***Caring for yourself isn't selfish
It is self-sustaining***

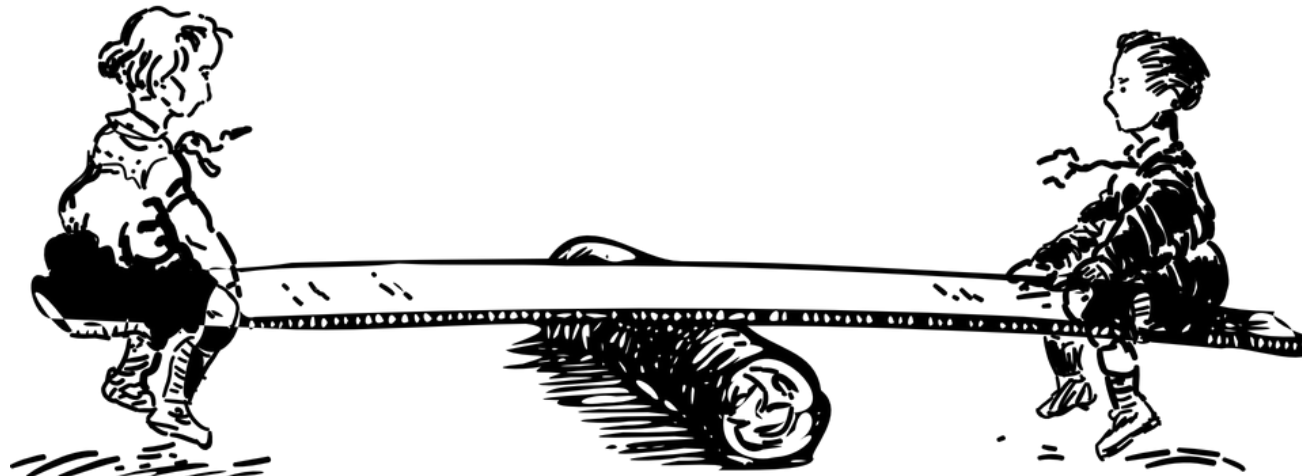


**“Put on your own
oxygen mask
before assisting
the person next to
you”**



What Are The Goals?

- A healthy balanced partnership in which each person gives and receives support, respect, affection
 - Open communication is essential
 - Roles may need to shift as abilities change or as people age
 - Aging partners assist and support one another as needs arise



What Are The Goals, Cont'd

- Optimal use of assistive devices
 - Maximizes safety and independence for the person with MS and yourself
 - Enables couples and families to share activities and adventures
 - Helps keep your world full, interesting, and active
- A safety net for the unpredictable future
 - Financial planning
 - Planning for the 'what ifs?'
 - The MS progresses and/or complications arise
 - The identified support partner becomes ill or disabled
 - The identified support partner passes away

Be On The Lookout For Red Flags

- If you find yourself behaving in ways you wouldn't want neighbors to see
- If you are using substances to manage your feelings
- If your work is suffering or you're unable to focus or concentrate
- If you're distancing yourself from your partner
- If you feel invisible, maxed out, or at your limit

Don't wait for a crisis, reach out for help.

**The National MS Society MS Navigators® (1-800-344-4867)
are available to help you find resources and support**



Key Take-Aways

- Support for a person with MS can take many forms
- Aging partners need to be prepared to support one another as needs arise
- Planning for unpredictability – related to MS, aging, finances, other health conditions – is essential
- Self-care for a support partner isn't selfish – it is self-sustaining and essential