

## What can I Expect from My Life?

# Adapting to Life with Multiple Sclerosis

Adapting to multiple sclerosis begins when the first symptom appears. The symptom is usually vague which may include mild numbness, some tingling, possibly a feeling of weakness, or occasionally some urgency of urination. The first thought many times is to deny that there is a problem and ignore it. If symptoms persist, fear often overcomes denial, often accompanied by self-directed anger. After the diagnosis, there often follows a sense of relief that the problem is medical, not psychological.

Relief may then disappear and again be replaced by anger and grief. Often we direct these feelings toward family, friends or physicians as if they were responsible for the disease. And then, the "why me?" feeling may develop. In short, there is a pattern that develops and cycles around. The end of the cycle is often accompanied by the feeling of peace that comes with understanding that life must go on.

Dr. David Welch has observed these stages of development in understanding MS: <sup>1</sup>

*Admission.* You allow yourself to admit the reality of MS. This admission is private and involves no one else. Implicit in this admission is that from that moment on all relationships will in some way be altered.

*Acknowledgment.* Eventually the fact that one has MS is reluctantly disclosed. Other people need to know if they are to respond properly to the person with MS.

*Accommodation.* Multiple sclerosis requires the subordination of some things to the requirements of others.

*Adaptation.* The environment needs to be modified to suit the conditions. The world needs to be changed to suit the person with multiple sclerosis, not the reverse.

Here are some practical techniques to help you live up to the expectations you have for your life.

Make a list of conditions required for positive self-esteem, and discipline yourself to create at least some of them.

Determine a way (small or large) to contribute to society and follow through with your plans.

Attend appropriate counseling sessions.

Learn to say "no" to certain requests in such a way that you do not damage your self-esteem.

Make a list of people who can be relied upon for various kinds of support. Call on them for assistance when you get those feelings of despair.

Discipline yourself to stay as healthy and physically fit as possible.

Create opportunities to get out of the house.

Take charge of situations rather than allowing them to take charge of you.

Prioritize projects.<sup>1</sup>

Multiple sclerosis is a lifelong disease - at least until a cure is found. Until that happens, with the appropriate medications and other types of therapy and a positive attitude, you'll be more likely to be able to manage your disease more effectively.

**References:**

1. Schapiro, R.T. Managing the Symptoms of Multiple Sclerosis, 4th ed. New York: Demos Medical Publishing; 2003.