

10 lessons of MS



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—Nancy Chamberlayne

by Nancy Chamberlayne



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Most people living with multiple sclerosis acknowledge that it can change a person’s physical abilities, put stress on relationships and sideline careers. But is there anything positive to be learned from having the disease? In a self-help group affiliated with the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada, we recently pondered this question and came up with some surprising “life lessons” MS has taught us. We have learned:

1. To be assertive about our opinions, desires and needs in our conversations with healthcare providers, family and friends.
2. To make strong choices and set boundaries.
3. To be more empathetic and thoughtful of others. We may even volunteer to help

individuals in need or organizations that are dear to our hearts.

4. That there is freedom in “letting go.” Though our physical abilities may be compromised, we have found we can adapt to our new realities by doing things differently—whether driving with hand controls, exercising from a chair or hiking with a walker.
5. That slowing down pays off. We have less emotional angst about the fact that things now take longer to do, and life is more peaceful when we’re not rushing.
6. That there are no guarantees with MS, so we focus on the present and appreciate the little things life has to offer.
7. That a sense of humor goes a long way toward coping with stress, whether it’s caused by life in general or by MS. (Uncoordinated fingers that flip cutlery off the table when eating is known as “sticky fingers syndrome” in one household, and leads to peals of laughter.)
8. That we are courageous and can cope with almost anything life throws our way.
9. That we have untapped creativity, often in the fine arts. Members have taken up painting, writing and photography as a means of coping with the stress of the disease. In doing so, we found we had skills that others appreciated.
10. That most importantly, MS is just one small part of who we are.

Nancy Chamberlayne, M.Ed., lives in Victoria, B.C., and is a regular contributor to the National MS Society and its sister organization in Canada.

To find a self-help group in your area, call an MS Navigator at 1-800-344-4867 or the [MS Society of Canada](#) at 1-800-268-7582.