

# **Biking with MS**



## **A new Bike MS program allows more people living with the disease to say, ‘I Ride with MS.’**

by Marcella Durand

### **Spinning your wheels?**

People with multiple sclerosis may wonder about the range of support available during Bike MS rides.

“At every start and finish line, and at every rest stop on every ride, we have shady shelters, accessible restrooms, and plenty of fluids and snacks available. We also have support and gear vehicles that can give a ride to anyone who feels [he or she] can’t continue,” says Paula Eichholz, national director for Bike MS. In addition, she notes, most rides have several mileage options.

Call 1-800-344-4867 to find a Bike MS event in your area.

People who ride in [Bike MS](#) events may do it to support family members, friends or co-workers who have been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. But there are also legions of participants who live—and ride—with the disease, despite challenges such as fatigue or weakness.

Now, anyone with MS who is interested in cycling to support MS research and programs can

join the I Ride with MS program, which has been expanded to all 100 Bike MS events nationwide, thanks to the support of Genzyme, a Sanofi company, and Primal Wear.

### **At her own pace**

“Bike MS was something I never considered,” says science teacher Rosemary Sieber, who was diagnosed with MS at age 19. Encouraged by her uncle, she began participating a year after her diagnosis. “It was scary,” the Pittsgrove, N.J., resident remembers. “I was still figuring out how my body responded to different things, but I bought a decent bike and just started training 10 miles at a time. I probably never would have gotten involved if not for my uncle.”

And involved she is. Bike MS turned out to be a doorway to a range of MS-related activities that Sieber participates in, including Walk MS and MuckFest MS. Last year, she added I Ride with MS, pedaling in the City to Shore Bike MS ride from Cherry Hill to Ocean City, N.J.



**Rosemary Sieber, right, shown with friend Melissa Love, participated last year for the first time in I Ride with MS.**

Photo courtesy of Rosemary Sieber

Sieber was careful to pace herself, however. “If I was feeling especially tired one day, I didn’t go out for a ride,” she says. Physical therapist Mandy Rohrig, PT, DPT, with Horizon Rehabilitation Centers in Omaha, Neb., agrees with that principle. “Remember that life happens and MS can happen,” she says. “Allow yourself some flexibility with your training when your MS causes you more challenges.”

Sieber also consulted with her doctor before beginning training, as people with MS should do when considering any new physical activity. “He had the same perspective I did,” she remembers. “He told me to listen to my body’s warning signs and to be smart about it.”

Rohrig recommends a consultation with a physical therapist as well. “A PT can provide a valuable pre-training step by helping you identify your physical strengths, as well as areas for potential improvement.”

### **A connection with roots**

While Sieber is relatively new to biking, it’s long been a favorite activity for Marleigh Brown of Wrentham, Mass. “Since I was a young teen, my bike was my freedom, my mode of transportation. My brothers and I were always riding together,” Brown says. She recalls that after she was diagnosed with MS at age 36, “my brothers were the first ones to say, ‘We are still going to ride together.’”

Brown and her siblings began recruiting a Bike MS team almost immediately after her diagnosis in 2009, and her brothers’ support gave her the confidence to complete the event. “When I learned about [I Ride with MS](#), it was an additional opportunity to spread awareness about MS,” she says. This will be the first year participants can raise awareness even more, by wearing free custom jerseys provided by Primal Wear, the official cycling apparel partner of Bike MS.



**I Ride with MS is a great opportunity to spread awareness about MS, says Marleigh Brown, shown here hugging her husband, Tim.**

Photo courtesy of Marleigh Brown

Facing the challenges Both Brown and Sieber face obstacles to cycling but have found strategies to manage them. To deal with heat, they time their rides for cooler parts of the day. “Our team is the first out in the morning,” says Brown.

Both women rely on keeping their muscles limber, as well. Sieber notes that she stretches not just after rides but often during them. Brown says she is a “huge fan” of yoga. “The stretches, especially in the hips, are very helpful for cycling,” says Brown, who had to learn to manage MS-related hip and leg issues in order to ride. Now she trains year-round, thanks to a stand she places her bike on during the long winters. “It creates a stationary bike out of your bicycle,” she says.

Rohrig encourages riders to have their bikes professionally fitted, which can be done by a PT or an associate at a bike shop. “A properly fitted bike facilitates an energy-efficient cycling form” that can help counteract fatigue, she says. “Also explore other types of bikes, such as a lightweight recumbent bike, a three-wheeled bike, a tandem (recruit a family member or friend!), a handcycle or a bike with a power-assist feature. Participating in I Ride with MS does not mean you must use a traditional bike. Bicycling is for all ability levels.”

Genzyme is a proud supporter of the Bike MS [I Ride with MS](#) program, and sponsored the pilot program in 2013. For information about how you can participate, visit [BikeMS.org](#).

**Marcella Durand is a frequent contributor to Momentum.**

Visit the National MS Society for [ideas on which pre-ride stretches](#) will work for you.