

Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde: MS and Mood Swings



You're so dramatic. You try too hard. How do you stay so upbeat all the time? Why are you always so negative? You're crazy.

These are all phrases that I have come to accept as things people will continue to say to me for the rest of my life. They all contradict one another, right? It takes you on a bit of a roller coaster when you start to think about how these could all be said to the same person, and usually within a short period of time.

When I was first diagnosed with MS, I was told that it could come with adverse effects on not only my physical health, but my mental health as well. It can be easy to become discouraged and depressed. While I try to remain positive, the one thing that makes MS nearly impossible to manage - at least for me - are the **mood swings!** I am constantly catching myself apologizing for my actions where sometimes an apology may not be warranted.

My relationships with people tend to become very complex because of the mood swings I am not in control of. One minute, I could be laughing with a coworker and sociable, while 10 minutes from then I could be crying silently at my desk because a thought came into my head. This may seem like something everyone goes through, but it's different for someone with MS. There are other factors to consider in every situation; am I cranky because I'm feeling fatigued? Was the day going fine, and then suddenly, I am secretly popping Tylenol because my arms are tingling? Sometimes there is no physical cause, either - with MS comes the risk of developing depression.

While I am constantly striving to brighten my days and everyone's days around me, there are moments where something will snap. That's something I have spent the years since my diagnosis accepting, because it is a factor in my life that I cannot change. It's okay to feel down out of nowhere, because there is more going on in your head than most people can even begin to imagine - literally and hypothetically!

When I come to the realization that my MS is affecting my mood and I've been, unfortunately, taking it out on the people around me, there are a few actions I take. I stop, think and remedy.

If I am suddenly the most unpleasant human being to be around, spewing sarcasm and negativity, I will stop and think. In reality, the person I am berating didn't do a thing to me, so why should they get the heat? When necessary, I will always apologize! Sometimes I will say, "I apologize, I'm having a rough day with my symptoms, etc." Sometimes I will keep my MS in the back of my mind, and say "I'm sorry, I'm just having a hard time emotionally today." No one needs to know the explicit details of your life unless **you** want to share.

It isn't the horrific mood swings that define you, it's your ability to bounce back from them!

Ever feel the crazy bug pinch you at an inexplicable moment? Maybe it's your hormones. Maybe it's something that happened to you that day. Maybe it's MS creeping up in the back of your head (no pun intended) just to say hi. If you've experienced the wild mood swings I have, you're not alone, and you **are not crazy!** Trust me, the mood swings may never go away, but they do get easier to recognize, control and handle.

I do not look at my MS as something that will ruin my life. I see it as an opportunity to really connect with others who have experienced similar situations as me and to work toward bettering the lives of others just like me.

No matter where you are in your struggles, you can do it. You are not alone and you never will be. Keep going, channel your emotions into something you love and smile!