



due to my medication?

And on and on it goes.

This aspect of MS can be confusing, overwhelming and disheartening.

The frustration is further perpetuated by even more questions.

Is this a symptom of MS, or is this a side effect of my treatment? Or is it indicative of something even more serious? Is this a relapse? Is my disease progressing? Do I need to report this to my doctor? Should I notify my family?

To a non-MSer, this familiar-to-us struggle may seem pretty cut and dry. A relapse is identified by experiencing a new symptom for more than 24 hours, yet many of us may still have a difficult time differentiating between an exacerbation vs. a flare-up vs. a relapse. And I think this comes from not fully understanding the vocabulary used (exacerbation, pseudo-exacerbation, relapse, attack, flare-up, episode, etc.) and also grasping that MS has the potential to leave no stone unturned.

One thing I've learned since being diagnosed with MS is the importance of self-advocacy and remaining vigilant and responsible when it comes to listening to my body. One way I stay on top of my symptoms is by keeping a journal or making notes on a calendar. That way, if something doesn't seem quite right and the time comes for me to check in with my doctor, I can give him an accurate record of how I've been feeling and for how long. I also check in with my husband from time to time and compare notes. He tends to pick up on small changes that I may brush off or not notice at all. It's helpful to hear his feedback and have that extra voice at the doctor's office.

However you choose to stay on top of your symptoms, just be sure to keep your doctor informed. That way, together, you can devise a plan to make sure fewer days are spent calling in sick and playing the dreaded "Is This MS?"