

MS Allies



“What can I do to help” is a phrase I often hear. Usually, the offer of help comes right after I tell someone that I live with MS, or sometimes comes after the person has learned of a close friend or family member living with MS and reach out to me to ask what steps to take next.

I have an answer.

I, and many in the MS community, need allies. It isn’t hard to be an MS ally and most of the time, our allies don’t even know what a huge role they play. MS allies have certain traits, and habits that translate to care, compassion and empowerment of those around them.

MS allies are born when they take a moment to engage with someone affected by MS. This might be reading a story in Momentum Magazine, listening to speaker at an event or watching video online. MS Allies carry that story with them and start viewing the world a little bit differently with the spark of new knowledge about what a person affected by MS might be facing on a daily basis.

This starts with accessibility. The new MS ally no longer entertains the idea of pulling into a blue badge parking spot, not even “just for a minute.” Movement through regular daily chores reveals a new take on how cognitively taxing it might be to navigate multi-step tasks like cooking a meal or a quick trip to the grocery store.

MS allies are willing and interested in learning, from engaging in webinars, signing up for email newsletters and attending in-person educational events. MS allies celebrate when we

receive news about research breakthroughs. In 2019, our community learned that about one million people in the US are affected by MS, more than originally thought. Our MS allies stood beside us and promised to continue to help and the MS community realized then, we also had more allies than we originally thought, too.

At a variety of events, from Walk and Bike MS to happy hours and a recent roller derby match, I watch my MS allies support me in any way they can, with all of their tools, talents and time. MS allies faithfully fundraise and donate to continue the mission of the National MS Society; to stop MS in its tracks, restore what has been lost and end MS forever.

The MS community is strong, resilient and takes the Golden Rule of loving your neighbor as yourself to the next level. MS allies in my community have traveled to out of state appointments with me, promoted our local MS connection group by taking flyers to their own medical appointments to share with medical staff and invited me to share my story at their workplace or social club, all in an effort to continue to raise awareness not just of multiple sclerosis, but what anyone can do to help. Our allies help build connections by introducing us to others affected by MS. The people that have taken a moment to grab a cup of coffee with me, catch up on what's new and how they can help, are the MS allies that I need alongside me.

Our MS allies also find opportunities to be MS activists and engage in the politics of life with chronic disease. MS activists speak up on behalf of the MS community because they have taken the time to listen to what our issues are, and what they can do to affect change.

The answer to how to help is simple: become an MS ally. Share in the conversation. Make connections. Being an MS ally means no one fights alone.