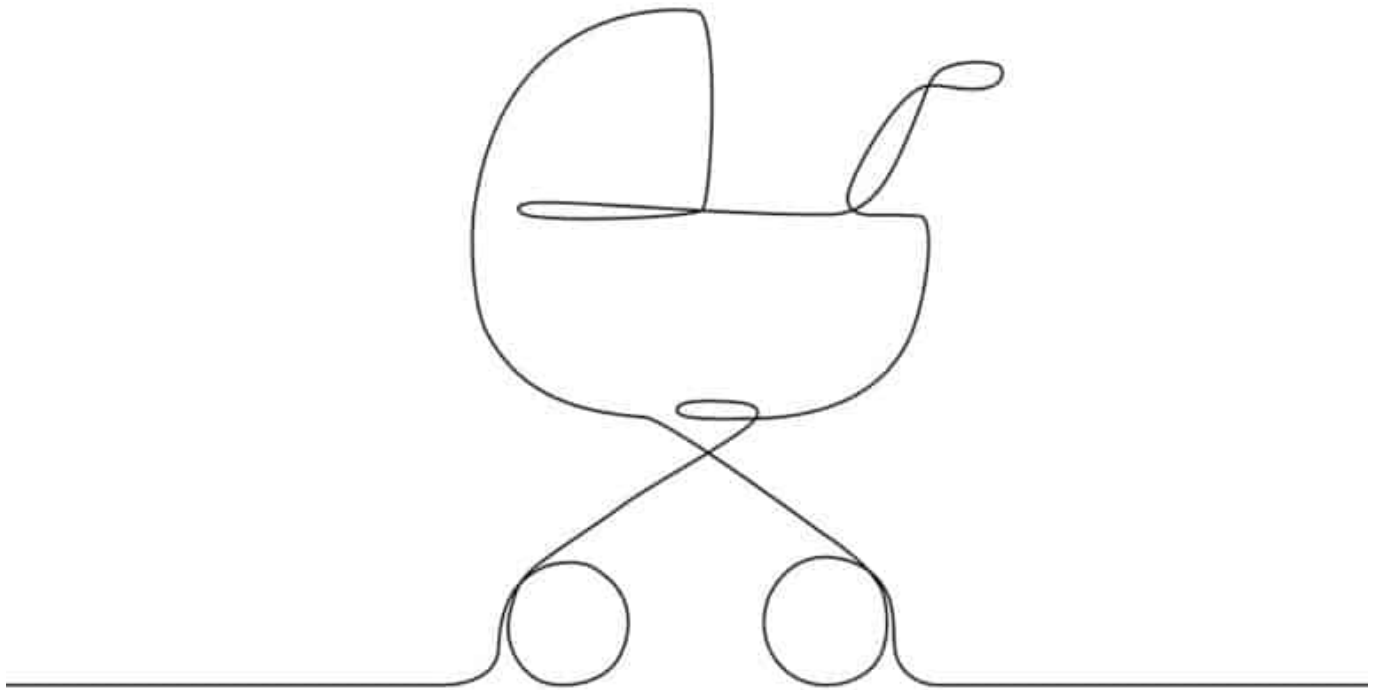


Pregnancy With MS: Relearning Strength



How long did it take for multiple sclerosis to become a normal, routine part of your days? I started on a therapy almost immediately following my diagnosis almost nine years ago, and it didn't take long to find my new norm. Mental and emotional strength and determination drove me to push forward with completing all my goals and to live the lifestyle I had set for myself prior to MS. It wasn't easy, but I kept pushing myself to remember that MS would not define me.

Tough "MSy days," as I like to call them, presented themselves occasionally over the years, but I felt good most of the time. Exercising daily, eating healthy and diligently taking my medication helped me live my best life with MS. No one would even know by looking at me that I have MS. I actually felt empowered by my ability to find so much success despite having the disease.

Then, in September 2021, I was seriously knocked back and humbled. My husband and I learned that we were expecting a son. Having children was something I never thought possible for me. To be honest, I had a complete emotional breakdown from the news and was overcome by fear. Would my MS worsen with pregnancy? Would I have to stop my medications, and what would happen if I did?

Following my positive pregnancy test, I contacted my neurologist as soon as the office opened Monday morning. She suggested I stop my therapy immediately. I remember fighting fear-induced tears on the phone with her. I prepared myself to overcome what would surely be unbearable MS changes. My entire body would be changing, and I would be medication-free for the first time in years. Fear and uncertainty quickly crept in, but I reminded myself

that I had overcome all of this before, and so I would again. I primed for battle, but it never came.

On the contrary, my MS symptoms retreated.

My legs weren't sore or numb, and my mind felt crisp and clear for the first time in a long time. My MS symptoms had become such a normal part of my life that I no longer noticed them except on exceptionally bad days, but I didn't even realize how bad they actually had been until they were completely gone during pregnancy. For the first time in a very long time I felt good, pre-MS good! For months, as my baby grew, I enjoyed being a "normal" non-MS human. It was amazing. I even started to forget what my body felt like with MS. My neurologist warned me that MS may rear its ugly head again after giving birth, but it was so hard to believe because of how great I felt.

During pregnancy, I tested positive for COVID-19, experienced shingles (which is absolutely horrible, by the way) and then went through my last weeks and birth with a severe full-body pregnancy rash. Still, MS was nowhere to be felt. My son is three months old now, and I'm sorry to report that my neurologist was right. My familiar MS symptoms came back almost immediately after Jhet's birth. Not only did they return, but they are worse than ever before. While I have no new symptoms, my previous ones are present and more frequent, more noticeable than they were a year ago. Unstable sleep, high stress and my body reacquainting itself with my medication are certainly to blame. I have moments of fear about it, but then I remind myself that I overcame shaky beginnings with MS once before. I grew strong from it then, and I will again.

Slowly, MS is becoming regular again in my days, and I allow myself to enjoy the "good days" as I work to put the amazing days I experienced during pregnancy behind me to move forward without comparison. Appreciating good MS days is important. Lingering in the past and what was before is a negative weight I must learn to leave behind, a piece of advice I would give to anyone working to overcome obstacles of any kind.

My MS journey has taught me so much already, but one of the most important lessons learned is the one of resiliency. The ability to positively accept what is and use it as a tool to overcome obstacles to find happiness and success is vital and admirable. MS doesn't make us weak, it makes us unstoppable with the ability to adjust and rise. I was afraid to bring new life into this world because of my MS, and I almost missed the opportunity to become a mom, to experience this amazing thing because of it. Never again will I give something so much power and control over my decisions and happiness.

You are strong. We are strong together, and we each can and will beat MS.

Editor's Note: Learn more about pregnancy, including post-partum and breastfeeding with

MS, on [the Society website.](#)