

# The Stigma of Dating With MS



**I'd like to talk about an issue that I have been facing while living with multiple sclerosis: the stigma of having MS can affect how other people see me. The biggest problem is that some people won't even give me a chance when they find out that I have MS, especially when it comes to dating. They don't realize that my life is pretty normal, and I have had successful relationships in the past; but for some, the moment they find out I have MS, they want to end the relationship.**

My situation is a bit of a mixed bag. From the outside, I look like a "normal" and healthy person. But once you are around me for a while, you'll see my symptoms from MS and how they affect my life. Some guys couldn't handle it, and they broke up with me. It's really a shame because I have a lot to offer in a relationship. I have had successful relationships, but things didn't work out for various reasons.

The most interesting thing for me is that every guy I have dated has also had issues they are facing. I've dated guys ranging from the highest education possible, to someone who has no formal education. Some guys have had diseases, emotional issues and physical problems. Their issues did not deter me from dating them. I can certainly empathize with their struggles in life because I was forced to adjust to living with MS at 18 years old.

I don't really remember what it's like to live without a physical challenge. Therefore, it encourages me to help others as much as possible and be an encouraging partner. I have become accustomed to making doctor's appointments for myself regularly, so it is very easy for me to help make a doctor's appointment for my boyfriends if they needed it. In many cases I knew that if I didn't do it for them, they wouldn't do it for themselves. I encourage

people who I am dating to also live a healthy lifestyle because I have seen what can happen if you don't take care of yourself, both physically and mentally.

Physically, I know that I feel much better when I eat a relatively healthy diet. I'm not super strict by any means, but when I eat unhealthy food on a regular basis, I feel physically ill. I also feel lethargic and lack motivation to do anything. Therefore, I've learned to eat well every day, and I encourage the same for whomever I am dating.

Mentally, I have learned the hard way that being overly stressed and unhappy can cause me to have a relapse from MS. The inflammation from a relapse can cause new damage in the brain or spinal cord. It disrupts nerve signals, which can lead to new debilitating symptoms. Since I've learned how detrimental it can be for my life while living with MS to become overly stressed and unhappy, I do absolutely everything I can to live a calm and peaceful life.

When I started dating people online, I did not say that I was living with MS in my profile because I knew some guys wouldn't even give me a chance. Once meeting guys in person, they would notice my symptoms, and I would gladly disclose the fact that I have MS, but I didn't want them to make assumptions before meeting me. I have been broken up with several times when guys eventually found out that I'm living with MS. In retrospect, I wish I would have disclosed that I was living with MS in my profile because then I would have never had to meet someone who was inconsiderate of my situation. That would have alleviated a lot of stress for me!

In 2021, it was incredibly refreshing to hear celebrities and professional athletes openly talking about their own personal struggles. Since they are idolized by so many, listening to their stories makes people like me feel more normal and not so alone. No one is perfect and we all have flaws. Life is unpredictable and you never know what is going to happen in your life. I live my life by making the best of every day. I'm always very thankful for everything I have and everything I'm able to do. I had a relapse from MS in 2007, and I lost the ability to walk, use my hands, and I had difficulty seeing. I am so grateful that those abilities came back, for the most part. Since I know what it's like to have abilities taken away, I try not to take anything for granted.

My best advice for single individuals living with MS who are looking for a partner is to be completely honest about your personal situation. It's very helpful to explain your limitations to your partner, and you can figure things out together.

Everyone has struggles in their life, and if someone is not going to accept you for any kind of issue you are facing, then they are certainly not worth being in your life. We all deserve to be happy!