

To My Fellow Men With MS



To everyone recently diagnosed or who is living with MS - particularly those young men out there - I have been there, and I am right there with you. I would like to share my story with you to ensure that you are not alone and continue pushing forward.

My name is Joseph Ball, I am 25 and live in Missouri. I was diagnosed in 2017 when I was 20. Over the years since my diagnosis, I have heard several comments, these two being the most common:

“You look fine, what’s wrong?”

“What’s MS?”

One thing I have learned is that people are unaware of MS and the symptoms surrounding the disease. It makes it more difficult for us men due to the standard that “men are strong, not weak” or that men “don’t have problems and don’t show emotion”

This is a stereotype that I believe men, including myself, have struggled with after my diagnosis. It is almost as if I am inclined to “put on an act” to meet that no merit “standard.” I work at a feed store and have had moments where I simply needed to sit down. When I told my supervisor, it was as if it was the end of the world, and felt like I was being told, “why do you need to sit down, you haven’t done anything yet.” To a man, a comment like this is not what we like to hear, as we are falling beneath our “standard.”

Let me tell all you men out there this.... forget what people say or think! You know your body, no one else does, you know your disease, no one else does. If you need a break or need to sit down, take one, listen to your body, don't listen to the uneducated person who knowingly or unknowingly comments on what you are doing. It just shows how little they know and that they fall into the stereotype of demanding "what a man should be." Is it worth hurting your body and potentially worsening your disease by overdoing it just to impress someone else who could care less? Absolutely not! Take that break, sit down, do what you need to do for **your** body.

This brings me into my next topic... emotion. When men hear this word, it tends to get us on edge. It seems men are not really supposed to show any emotion, this goes back to the stereotyping that I mentioned above. If you haven't been affected emotionally with MS yet, give it time. It's coming. This is one of the biggest issues that I struggle with, and it has been a challenge to put on the expected look and try to hold it in. Over the years I have learned not to do this, it just isn't worth it at all. I know this is easier said than done, but it does get easier as time goes on and you realize there really is no merit to hiding emotion, and your body will thank you for doing so.

I hope this has helped open the mind of those men who have MS or were recently diagnosed. Hang in there and keep on fighting, just know you are not alone and that there are more people who deal with the same thing than you may realize.