

Moving forward with MS symptoms



An athlete's experience with MS

Chris Ramsey is a husband, father, physical therapist and ultra athlete who was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 2011. Today, he remains a family man, a physical therapist and an athlete, and he's committed to moving forward in all these areas of his life. MS has changed his life, but he hasn't allowed it to define him.

"I was a nationally ranked triathlete, swimming, biking and running, when I was diagnosed with MS," says Chris. "I competed before my diagnosis and I kept competing after my diagnosis. I've been lucky to be able to stay active, but as a physical therapist, I also know that exercise can help anyone, no matter what their state of health is."

Chris eventually retired from competing in triathlons for two reasons. First, after 22 years, he'd had enough of that kind of competition. But running also became less fun when a brain stem lesion related to his MS developed in his vestibular ocular center, which led to problems with vision and balance. That didn't stop Chris from moving, however - he stays active by racing on his bike.

Getting support for "invisible" symptoms

Like others living with MS, Chris' symptoms may not be visible to the outside world. He says, "I've actually had people argue with me that I can't have MS and I'm telling them, 'Yes, I do!' They just can't feel what I'm feeling. For example, parts of my body sometimes feel like they're vibrating, like I have a cell phone ringing in my pocket. Or it feels like something is burning my skin even though it's just sunlight coming through the window."

Since MS symptoms vary so greatly from person to person, being able to connect with others living with MS can offer special support and insight. In Chris' case, this meant having people in his life who understood symptoms that even his wife might not recognize as MS-related.

“Sometimes I have to take a nap, and it’s not negotiable,” Chris says. “If I’m driving, I’ll have to pull over to a shady spot, tilt the seat back and take a nap so I can make my way home safely. Or my mood will shift, and I’ll get angry really fast. This isn’t something I’m doing on purpose, it’s something my brain is doing. People may not understand that these are all symptoms of MS because they don’t look like the images people have of the disease.”

The National MS Society supported Chris by connecting him with others who had “been there, done that.” Especially for those newly diagnosed, the variety of symptoms that may come with the disease can be overwhelming, and the possible courses of treatment are confusing. That’s when reaching out to a supportive community can make all the difference.

And Chris’ experience as a physical therapist helps him remind his MS friends that all the things we say everyone should do for better health — a good diet, physical activity, plenty of sleep — are even more important for people with MS.

“One of the things that people with MS tend to overlook is that, on average, we’re less active than the general population,” he says. “We’re also more likely to be depressed, even though research has shown that exercise is one of the best ways to prevent depression. So any amount of exercise, at any level, is going to be a positive step forward.”

That spirit is what keeps Chris moving ahead in all areas of his life. As he explains, “I’m going to keep exercising and keep helping people as a physical therapist for as long as I can. I’ll definitely keep being a husband and father. And I’ll keep promoting the idea that you can be healthier than you are now, whether you have MS or not!”

Download the National MS Society’s [“Now What? Resources to Keep You Moving Forward with MS”](#) and get the information, resources and connections you or a loved one need to navigate an MS diagnosis.