

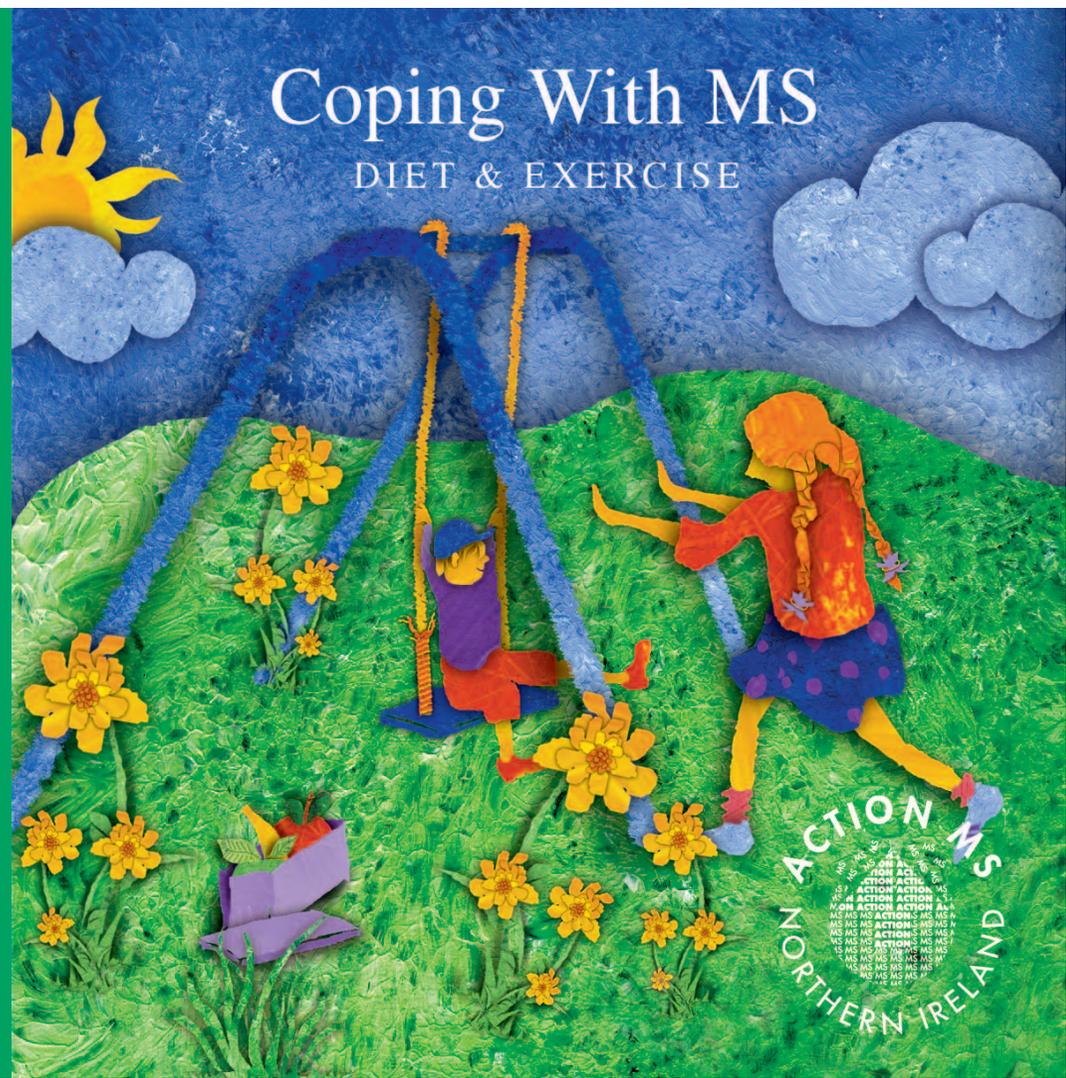
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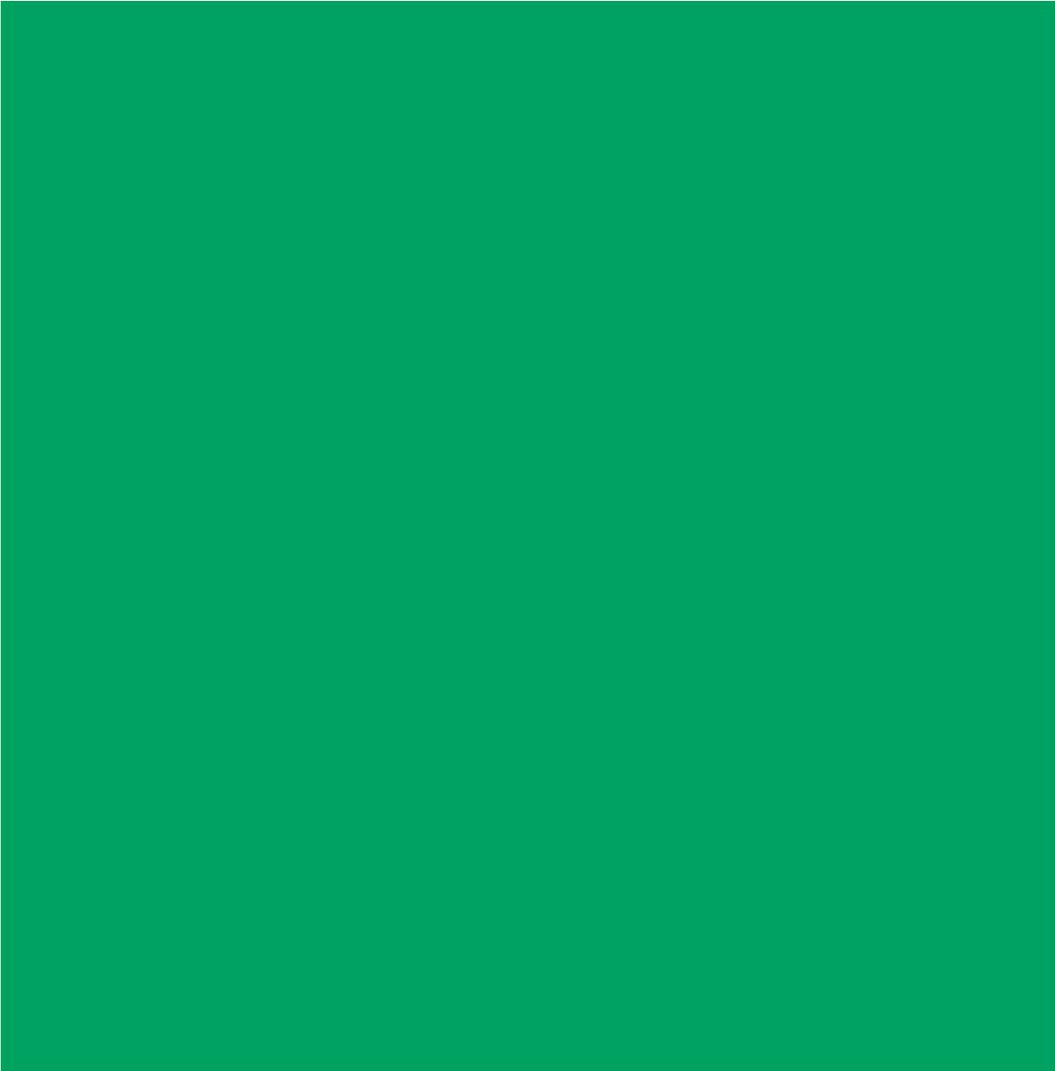
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# Coping With MS

## DIET & EXERCISE



Action MS - fighting MS since 1976

*Action MS Northern Ireland was formed in 1976 when a small group of people with MS, families and friends decided to do something to fight multiple sclerosis, a disease of the central nervous system for which there is as yet no cure.*

### *Medical Research*

The most obvious starting point was to raise funds for medical research. Over the years with the support of the whole community Action MS has raised thousands of pounds for research work at the Royal Victoria Hospital and the Belfast City Hospital. MS is still a puzzling disease but advances have been made in developing treatments and enhancing quality of life.

### *Caring Services*

Action MS tries to live up to its name. That means offering support to people with MS and to those who care for them. We continue to listen to what those who have MS need and offer support where and when it is most needed.

## Coping with MS

### ■ *Diagnosis*

When a person is diagnosed with MS it is a shattering experience. Life will never be the same again. The future may look bleak - career in doubt, relationships threatened, hopes drained and plans on hold. Dead end. But it needn't be this way. For many life goes on as normal.

How people respond to such a situation is not cut and dried. Each individual reaction will be different and perhaps some are already familiar to you.

**“No, not me!”** There is the tendency to deny that MS exists. This denial is expressed in various ways - refusing to seek advice, avoiding any talk about MS, not wanting to tell family, friends and colleagues, turning a blind eye to information leaflets!

The reverse may also be true. Some people may cram, cram and cram as much information as they can get about MS. Thinking about MS is an academic exercise - better than facing the reality. Anyway, MS only happens to others.

So a numbing sense of disbelief sets in and life becomes an “as if” experience - “as if” MS does not exist.

This denial is a common and natural reaction to an MS diagnosis. It acts as a cushion that absorbs the shock, even the horror, of the news that seems to have shattered your life.

### **Then there comes a time to move on - learning to live with MS.**

**“Why me?”** This is an angry question. There is no satisfactory answer. So we take our frustration out on others. It is a rage against life. It helps to openly talk about this sense of anger. It is a healthy way to deal with it and in doing so we learn to share our anger and the burden that it imposes on our day to day life.

### **Then there comes a time to move on - learning to live with MS.**

**“But not now.”** This is a bargaining position, an attempt to push MS into the future. It’s a natural response to a situation over which we have no control. But the sooner we accept that we are facing a “now” situation the better.

### **Then there comes a time to move on - learning to live with MS.**

**“Yes me.”** There is a very close link between long-term illness and depression. Yes, we accept the diagnosis and we are depressed.

### **Then there comes a time to move on - learning to live with MS.**

**“I don’t like it but I accept it.”** At this point we may reach a stage when constructive ideas on how to cope with MS may grow. So ways and means are found to overcome and control the impact of the disease. It is important to try and be positive and open to change, tackling things rather than being a victim of MS. Give it a go without being obsessed with the problems, treatments and ways of controlling MS.

### **Then there comes a time to move on - learning to live with MS.**

**Moving on.** The most constructive way for anyone to cope with MS is to accept it, here and now. This starts the process of dealing with our sense of loss. It is also natural to share our sense of anger, to explain our feelings and better to be honest with ourselves and others.

### **■ *Learning to live with MS***

Get information about the disease. Look at the facts, dispel the myths.

You are only human. There will be ups and downs in coping with MS. So don’t expect to handle every situation perfectly.

Remember your family and friends are coping with the MS diagnosis as well so don't expect too much from them.

Share your sense of loss with people you trust.  
Talk it through and be open with your family and friends.

Ask questions about MS and the future.  
But remember there may not always be a clear answer.

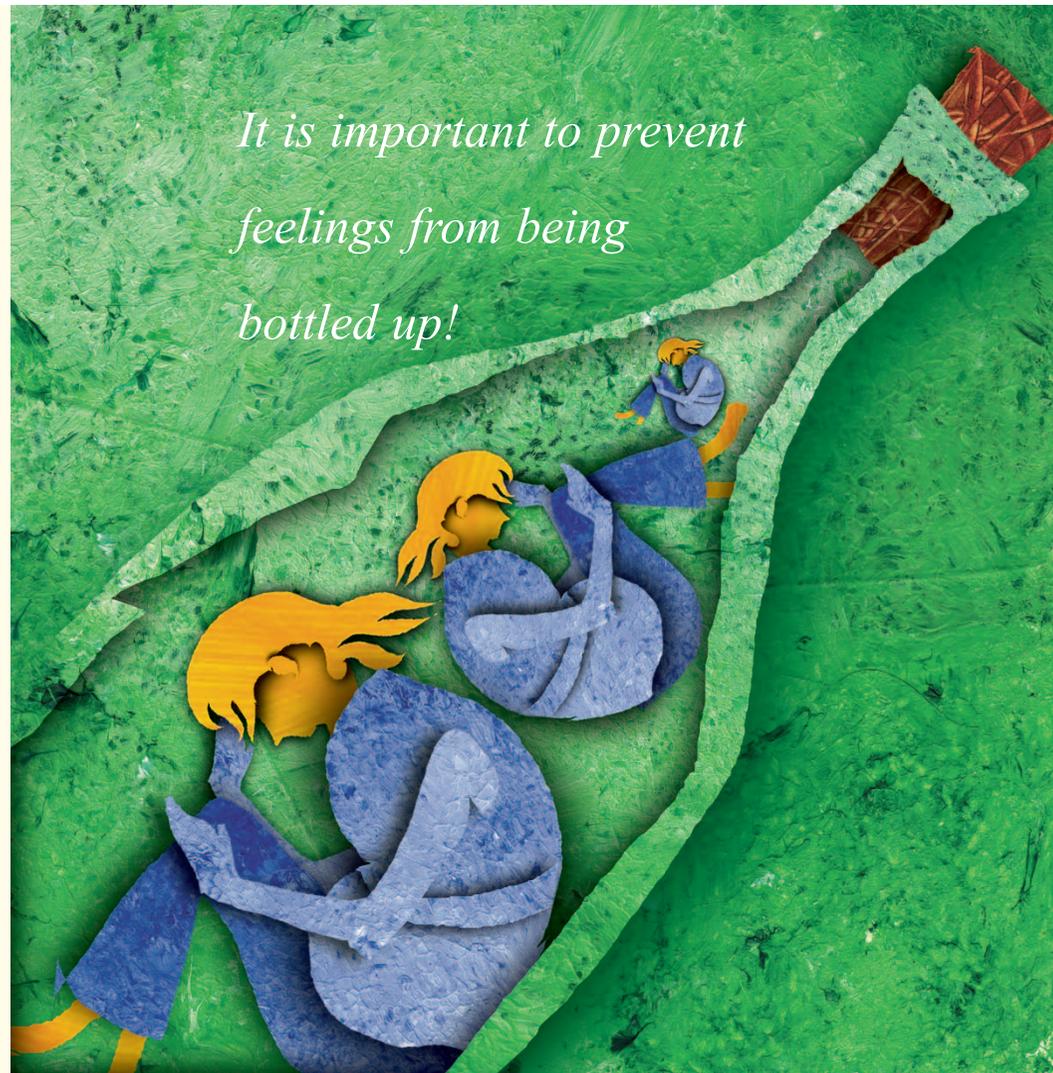
### ■ *Emotions*

It is not easy adapting to life with a long-term illness. Powerful emotions abound and they can hurt both ourselves and those around us, whether they are feelings of anger or a kind of euphoria that is shallow and distant from the reality.

Carers have to cope with feelings of being inadequate, powerless to change things for the better. They may also be angry towards the person with MS - it's so unfair. And of course there are feelings of remorse. In such a painful situation it is better to talk about it, face it and prevent feelings from being bottled up. They will only explode in an emotional outburst that is destructive and stressful.

**Remember Action MS is here for you.  
We would love to hear from you**

*It is important to prevent  
feelings from being  
bottled up!*



## ■ *Depression*

This is the “common cold” of mental disorders. Most of us experience it to some degree as we go through life. However, severe forms of depression may overwhelm someone with feelings of fear and despair, apathy, hopelessness and inner desperation.

People with MS will experience periods of depression. It comes in many forms, prompted by various factors, not least fatigue. Often it is part of the ongoing process of coming to terms with MS. Depression blunts our sense of humour, saddens our heart and gives rise to negative attitudes towards life and living. It may also lead to feelings of low self-esteem and an inability to get the job done. Appetite, sleep patterns and sexual interest may be disrupted and generally life becomes dull.

## ■ *Treatment of Depression*

Antidepressant drugs may help - the more serious the depression the more likely they are to help. But milder forms of depression can be eased simply by talking to a friend or family member or counsellor. It can be a relief to talk about feelings of anxiety, guilt and despair. Of course it is well known that depression can feed on itself. You get more depressed about being depressed! So it is important to break its grip. Dwelling on problems is not the answer.

## Here are some tips on how to deal with depression.

Find things to do that are absorbing and help to take your mind off the problems, at least for a while.

- Treat yourself occasionally.
- Look good, exercise, eat well.
- Tidy up around you and change the look of the place - knock a wall down!
- Try and take a break from the usual routine.

And remember, there is help at hand - ask for it. And if you need to, cry. Do your best to try some of these tips and you may be pleased with the results.

## ■ *Stress*

When under stress we may be tearful and generally difficult to live with. The most mild mannered person may become verbally and physically abusive. MS is stressful - it changes our lives, it causes problems. And it is made all the more difficult when we refuse to ask for help in coping with stress. Remember assistance may come in many ways - starting with yourself.

### Here are some things you may do to overcome stress.

- Strike a balance between doing too much and too little.
- Learn to relax, pace yourself, be flexible.
- Ask for the help and support you need, when you need it.
- Live a regular lifestyle - good diet, exercise, sleep.
- Open up to others, avoid emotional barriers.
- Take a step at a time in dealing with change.
- Live in the 'now' not in the past or the future.
- Make choices and decisions about your life.



## Diet & Exercise

### ■ *MS and Diet*

There has been a great deal written in recent years about what we should eat and what we should drink. In a nutshell you should eat and drink what suits you and helps you to keep healthy. That means moderation in all things.

This leaflet sets out some of the basic points about diet with a particular concern for what the person with multiple sclerosis should be looking out for in trying to maintain some degree of balance in a daily diet of food and drink.

### ■ *Vitamins*

Of course we all need vitamins. But why? Well, the body in its wisdom uses vitamins to make the most of the food we eat. If you must have the biological, scientific facts about vitamins consult a good book or a nutritionist. But remember, large doses of vitamins taken regularly can be harmful.

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## ■ Minerals

**Iron** is the most well known mineral because without it we may suffer from anaemia that leaves us limp and without energy. The best sources of iron are meat, eggs, beans and green vegetables. The latter stood Popeye in good stead! But beware taking iron as a supplement to a normal diet. A high concentration of iron is dangerous and should never be given to children as a supplement unless prescribed by a doctor.

**Calcium** is a mineral that is essential in the formation of bones and teeth. The sooner we take calcium the better. It is found in dairy products, fish, beans and green vegetables. Popeye had the right idea!

If you suffer from reduced movement then any loss of calcium from the bones is serious. Osteoporosis, for example, is a condition which leads to the bones becoming honeycombed and fragile. Food is the best source of calcium as tablets have been shown to be less effective.

**Salt** is a pressure control mineral - it can keep the various fluids in the body at the right pressure. However the body normally adjusts fluid balance as we eat and drink. So danger comes when we overload with salt. Then high blood pressure may result and that in turn can lead to heart disease and strokes. Processed foods tend



to put our salt intake on the high side so think about it and aim for balance.

## ■ *Carbohydrates*

We recognise carbohydrates in two forms - sugar and fibre.

The body converts the “starchy” foods we eat into sugar for energy - foods such as bread, rice, pasta, peas, potato, cereals. So along with fruit and vegetables these are the main energy foods.

The body needs to get rid of waste and fibre helps the digestive and bowel systems to work efficiently - even regularly! Fibre helps prevent constipation and is found in vegetables and fruit.

## ■ *Protein*

Protein is a builder and repairer. It helps to restore parts of the body such as skin and muscles. The main foods that give us protein include steak, chicken, liver, eggs, milk and combinations thereof such as cheese. Nuts, peas and beans, fruits and cereals such as soya, and bread - all these contain protein.

But remember the calorie factor. Eat enough protein to help the body do repairs but not too much otherwise you put on weight!

## ■ *Fats*

Fat is a protector. It protects vital organs and also acts as a store for energy. On the negative side it causes obesity and often, in the nicest possible way - chocolate bars, chocolate biscuits, burgers, cream buns .... yummy things! So beware.

Saturated fat - mostly found in animal products such as cheese and butter - contributes to heart disease when taken in excess.

Polyunsaturated fat - mostly found in cereals and some poultry and fish - contains essential fatty acids which help to build cell walls in the immune system. This building attribute is very relevant when it comes to repairing the myelin sheath, the membrane scarred in MS.

## ■ *Drinks*

Water - we need approximately four litres a day. It seems a lot but remember there is water in the food we eat. And if you are unable to eat a reasonable amount each day it is important to drink more water. That need not be a bore as you may choose from a selection of flavoured drinks, tea, coffee, orange juice. Of course tea and coffee contain caffeine but there is no evidence to suggest that they affect people with MS more than anyone else.

Alcohol is often part of person's social life. Moderation is the key-note for as everyone knows the effects of large amounts of alcohol over a period of time can be deadly! As for the person with MS, there is no evidence that moderate consumption of alcohol will accelerate the progress of MS. However the immediate effect of alcohol - unsteadiness, reduced co-ordination, slower reflexes - may be seen in an MS drinker more quickly. Also alcohol is a depressant and if you are already depressed it may make matters worse, although at the time things may seem rosy! Certain types of medicine mixed with alcohol makes for a dangerous cocktail.

So moderation then - know how much you are drinking, drink alcohol in a measured way, not in large binge amounts, and don't drink and drive!

### ■ *Smoking*

Smoking can damage your health, in particular blood circulation, which in turn is vital to the good working order of the central nervous system. It may also reduce the capacity of blood to take up oxygen and that may leave you breathless. If MS has reduced your mobility then smoking may increase your chances of developing chest conditions such as bronchitis. Moreover, if you already have trouble with opening the bladder smoking may add to the problem. Nicotine strengthens the muscle that keeps the bladder shut.

*Drink alcohol in a measured way, not  
in large binge amounts!*



*So here's to a balanced and healthy diet!*

### Some tips you may like to keep in mind:

#### Keep meals simple.

Try brown rice, wholemeal pasta or jacket potatoes as the basis for main meals. Add a little protein such as fish, poultry, red meat, an egg or two and occasionally some low-fat cheese or lentils, beans or soya products. Raw salads and lightly-cooked vegetables go down well.

#### Enjoy natural foods, avoid fatty sugary foods, increase fluid intake - try two litres of pure water a day.

Forget about full-cream milk and order skimmed or semi-skimmed. Low fat natural yoghurt is an excellent cream replacement.

### ■ *Cook's Comments*

Bulk cooking is worth considering. The freezer may be just the thing to help you over the days when you really don't feel like cooking.

Try some simple recipes and save energy and if there are children about let them get involved in preparing the meal.

### Sample this simple recipe

The ingredients need not be measured.

- Vegetable broth
- 3 pints of water
- 2 vegetable stock cubes
- 3 small handfuls of soup mix (dried barley etc)
- 1 pre-cut soup pack

Put water in large saucepan and bring to the boil, adding stock while heating (they dissolve easily). Add dried soup mix.

Simmer for 20 minutes. Add rinsed contents of soup pack.

Simmer for further 15 minutes. The stock cubes contain salt so no more salt is required.

Optional extras - a diced potato, tinned kidney or haricot beans. There are no set rules - whatever you fancy may do you good!

It all goes down well with some chunky wheaten bread. The soup is also suitable for freezing and can be divided into individual or family portions and stored in either margarine tubs or freezer bags.

## ■ *Exercise*

Most people think of exercise as a sport that involves some form of strenuous activity. This is only partly true for exercise may also mean doing things gently, regularly and simply.

People with MS need to exercise for strength. It also helps to sharpen reflexes and maintain balance.

So what can the MS person do by way of exercise? Well this will obviously depend on each individual's condition. As an example, one simple exercise is to play wing ball with the children - it certainly sharpens the reflexes! There are many other simple forms of exercise: knitting, pastry making, waxing the car. And to keep the mind alert try keeping up with the action on the latest computer game.

For the house proud there is good exercise in a rigorous vacuuming routine or in picking your way through the weeds in the garden. Or get on your hobby horse - go dancing, walk in the country and watch the birds or swing at a few golf balls on the local driving range.

Of course for some people there is no satisfaction unless they are in a sweat, breathing faster and deeper and really feeling the pain of a workout! All this amounts to good exercise and there is plenty



of choice - weight training, aerobics, swimming, running up and down stairs, wheelchair pushing, a brisk walk.

### ■ *Fatigue*

Of course fatigue can be a real problem for people with MS so pacing yourself is vital. This means finding the best time in the day for exercise as well as understanding your limitations. Try some form of exercise - 20 minute sessions, three times a week.

Remember too that fatigue is frustrating and trying to overcome it may lead to stress. Yet exercise can ease stress so try and make the effort at your own pace and in your own way.

### ■ *Benefits*

Often people will say that they don't really feel like exercise. However once they try it they have more energy and a "clearer" head. It is suggested too that simple, regular exercise helps to reduce depression.

Be warned! You can have too much of a good thing. Remember to pace yourself. Start slowly, gently and work up a regular routine. The physiotherapist will advise and help you plan exercise that suits you including ideas on how to adapt to change.

**Remember Action MS is here for you.  
We would love to hear from you**



# Learning to live with MS

## *Some Suggestions*

- Join an MS support organisation such as Action MS. It helps to share problems and exchange information with others.
- Be patient and don't expect too much from yourself or others. Perfection is not always possible.
- Eat a healthy, balanced diet.
- Learn some useful exercises and keep practicing!
- Live one day at a time.
- Get adequate rest and sleep.
- Be informed - ask questions, know where to get answers.
- Seek advice - understand the symptoms of MS.
- Use the Health and Personal Social Services.
- Use neurologists, MS Nurses, physiotherapists and other professionals.

- Use specialist agencies as necessary such as Relate and Citizens Advice Bureau.
- Claim your right to benefits and allowances.

*Everybody Needs Help Sometime!*

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## Action MS Information Services

Action MS provides various free information booklets. If you would like to receive more information please tick the appropriate box on this request card and send it to Action MS at the address below. Information is also available on the Action MS website at **[www.actionms.co.uk](http://www.actionms.co.uk)**.

Action MS invites new members. If you would like to join please enclose £4 annual subscription. As a member you will receive regular information about various activities and updates on multiple sclerosis research work.

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### *Booklets List (please tick)*

- Action MS Northern Ireland
- Multiple Sclerosis? Questions and Answers/Help is at Hand
- More About Symptoms
- MS and the Family
- Coping with MS/Diet & Exercise
- I wish to become a member of Action MS
- I enclose £4.00 annual membership subscription

**Name:** .....

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