

# Overcoming negativity

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Having a chronic condition may, at times, make you feel less optimistic about the future, and divert your attention away from enjoyment of the moment. It can be difficult to see others who have short term illnesses getting treatment, improving, and eventually returning to what seems to be normal life. Having MS can feel like being stuck in the slow lane. A combination of pervasive fatigue, relapses that seem to make time stand still, and medical appointments that seem to be stretched out, months apart, can easily lead to a sense of being stuck in a time warp. But it is vital for your mood, your general well being, and your family, not to let brief spells of pessimism become prolonged dark spells. Here are a few ways you can get the wheels turning forward again...

**Your wellbeing depends on your own mood state and not other people's.** Don't let the naysayers tell you that MS has to be depressing. While your physical state may take its own path, you do have a lot of control over your own thoughts, feelings, and behaviour. Sometimes others who are struggling may try to bring you down with them, as they seek reassurance that they are not alone. Try to keep charge of your own mood, by remembering that each person's progress is different, and your own progress will depend on your own attitude. Staying hopeful, being in the moment, and scheduling activities are all well established ways of buoying up your mood and pulling it out of a slump.

**Leave guilt to one side.** Guilt is not actually a pure emotion, but is usually a combination of anxiety and anger, often mixed with self-doubt. You may find that a sense of guilt stops you from considering what is right for you, and lets others stand in the way of what you want. Think about what you would tell a friend who was in your situation. Would you suggest that they should feel bad about seeking enjoyment and satisfaction? I doubt it – you are much more likely to give them credit for having the motivation to engage in pleasurable and fulfilling activities in spite of their MS. So follow this advice yourself. Guilt serves no useful purpose. It simply hinders

us from trying new things, learning ways of coping, and giving ourselves permission to be happy.

**Focus on your strengths and seek to develop the areas that challenge you.** Suffering from fatigue? Ask your doctor or nurse about how graded exercise can improve stamina. Experiencing memory problems? Read up on cognitive training and strategies to improve focus. Feel like there's nothing you can do? Check out your library or the internet for local voluntary groups, reading groups, or arts/craft workshops.

**Unleash a hidden talent or develop a new skill.** If you have had to reduce your hours or leave work altogether, consider how you can use your time to develop an interest you have always wanted to pursue, but were too busy to make time for. Thinking about what will give your life meaning *in spite of* the MS can have surprising benefits. You may find that you are more emotionally resilient, but also feel more exhilarated physically.

**'The difficulty is the path'**, is often quoted in meditation writings. Think about what path you would like to be on, and consider difficulty to be part of the learning process, rather than something to be avoided. Taking modest, small steps at first can ensure that your MS does not become an insurmountable barrier along your path.