

Winter/Spring 2026



# THE Motivator

Published by the Multiple Sclerosis Association of America

## *Enhanced Wellness*

Healthy Strategies  
for People with MS



12<sup>TH</sup> *Improving  
Lives Benefit*

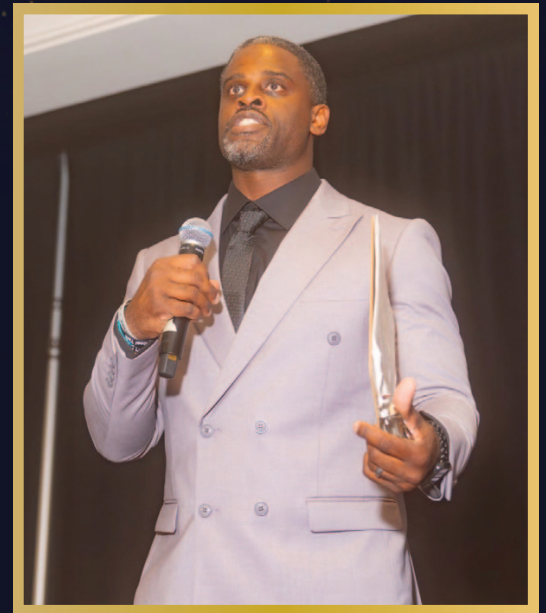
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### MSAA National Headquarters

375 Kings Highway North, Suite B  
Cherry Hill, New Jersey 08034  
**(800) 532-7667 | mymsaa.org**

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*By Tom Garry*

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The Multiple Sclerosis Association of America is the leading resource for the MS community, improving lives today by delivering vital services and compassionate support, while advancing access, research, and innovation to strengthen the MS community for tomorrow.

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# Resources for Today, Hope for Tomorrow



**By Amanda Montague, EdM**

MSAA Interim President and CEO

I want to take a moment to recognize the loss of two valued members of the MS community, Dr. Andy Woo and Dr. Leo Maher. Dr. Woo practiced in Santa Monica, California, and served on MSAA's Board of Directors. Dr. Maher served on MSAA's Healthcare Advisory Council and his practice was based in Hawaii. Both Dr. Woo and Dr. Maher were beloved by their patients and all those who were fortunate enough to know them. Their dedication to patient-centric care and commitment to improving the lives of people with MS will not be forgotten. We extend our deepest condolences to both Dr. Woo's as well as Dr. Maher's family and friends. Both of these devoted neurologists will be greatly missed.

As we continue our mission of improving lives today for people affected by multiple sclerosis, I am continually inspired by the strength of the MS community and the many partners, clinicians, researchers, and supporters who work alongside us to advance care, research, and access to resources.

One of the most exciting developments this year has been the continued progress of the Multiple Sclerosis Implementation Network®

(MSIN®). I am pleased to share that we have now reached an important milestone – more than 1,000 individuals with MS have enrolled in MSIN across 20 clinical sites. This achievement reflects the dedication of our partners and the willingness of people living with MS to participate in research that will help us better understand the disease and improve future care. MSIN is designed to generate meaningful, real-world insights, and every participant contributes to building a stronger foundation for the future of MS care.

March marked Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Month, a particularly special time when we come together to elevate awareness, share stories, and highlight the ongoing needs of the MS community. Throughout the month, MSAA worked with advocates, partners, and individuals across the country to expand everyone's understanding of MS and ensure that those affected know they are not alone. Awareness leads to action – whether through education, advocacy, research participation, or supporting organizations that provide critical services.

In looking ahead, I'm pleased to share that MSAA has recently developed our new three-year strategic plan focused on expanding support for the MS community. As part of our

strategic planning process, we have updated MSAA's mission and vision statements to better reflect the focus of our organization and what we envision for the future. We remain committed to improving lives today for the MS community, and we want to ensure that MSAA continues to adapt and grow as the needs of the MS community evolve. Please visit [mymsaa.org/strategicplan](https://mymsaa.org/strategicplan) for additional details.

In this edition of *The Motivator*, we feature an informative cover story that focuses on improving one's long-term wellness. Strategies are provided to help achieve optimal health and include such topics as connecting with one's healthcare team, as well as exercise, nutrition, and sleep. Please be sure to check out this important article.

And finally, we are excited to gather with supporters, partners, and members of the MS community at MSAA's 12th Improving Lives

Benefit in Philadelphia. This special evening helps raise critical funds that support the programs and services MSAA provides at no cost to the MS community. Events such as this are a powerful reminder that progress happens when a community comes together with a shared purpose. This year, we are proud to be honoring Tyler Campbell and his amazing patient advocacy work and icometrix for their vital work in advancing MRI technology. If you can't join us in person, we hope you can join us virtually, as we will be livestreaming the event for everyone to enjoy. For more details, please see our "Thoughts About Giving" column beginning on page 31.

Thank you to everyone who continues to support MSAA's work. Together, we remain committed to expanding knowledge, improving access to care, and ensuring that people living with MS have the resources they need today – and hope for tomorrow. ■

**Amanda Montague, EdM** is the Interim President & CEO for the Multiple Sclerosis Association of America (MSAA). Ms. Montague has been a dedicated member of MSAA's senior management team and a vital part of MSAA for more than 20 years. In her previous role as Chief Mission Officer at MSAA, Ms. Montague led all programmatic and educational initiatives, as well as partnerships with stakeholders and relationships with the MS healthcare professional community. In addition to her work at MSAA, Ms. Montague also serves as a Stakeholder Reviewer for the Patient Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI) in Washington, DC, has served as a member of the American Academy of Neurology's (AAN) MS Quality Measure Review Panel, and has published and presented research in major journals and at national and international conferences.

Amanda has a BA in Economics from Smith College, an EdM in Risk & Prevention from Harvard Graduate School of Education, and an MA in International Patient Advocacy Management from Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Rome, Italy.

# Enhanced Wellness

## Healthy Strategies for People with MS

By Tom Garry

Edited by Susan Wells Courtney

Reviewed by Barry A. Hendin, MD

### SECTION 1

### Preparing a Plan and Avoiding Obstacles

#### Introduction

Physical wellness and emotional well-being are vitally important for everyone, but particularly for members of the MS community, who strive to minimize symptoms and feel their best. This can be especially difficult when certain symptoms interfere with one's routine or ability to stay active.

However, individuals with MS may be better equipped to improve their wellness and well-being by following the healthy strategies for pursuing those benefits listed throughout this cover story.

Creating a personalized plan that focuses on areas such as exercise, diet, and sleep, along with other activities, can result in long-term physical and emotional wellness – and

this is something we should all strive to achieve!

*Editor's note: Individuals should not make any changes to their exercise routine, diet, or other daily activities without consulting their medical professional.*

#### The importance of “why” versus “what” when taking on something new

Researchers report that roughly 80% of New Year's resolutions are abandoned by mid-February. That statistic doesn't surprise Robert Motl, PhD, an expert on exercise in MS who serves as Professor in the Departments of Kinesiology and Nutrition

and Rehabilitation Services at the University of Illinois Chicago.

Dr. Motl explains that sustaining change requires identifying what drives you – and will keep driving you when the going gets tough.

“For example, when people with MS decide that they want to get more physically active, the first thing to think about isn’t which exercises they will do. Instead, they really should think long and hard about their ‘why.’ In other words, what are they hoping to accomplish or improve? They need to know their ‘why’ because not only will that give them motivation to start exercising, it will also give them something far more valuable: determination.

“The ‘why’ has to be something very salient, very meaningful to them because, invariably, exercise becomes hard. Sometimes it hurts or leaves us sore. Sometimes we’re tired afterwards. Sometimes we have other things that we want to do, but if you have the determination that comes from knowing your ‘why,’ this will help you to continue working toward your goal,” he says.

To define your “why” and record it for subsequent reference, please see “Mapping Your Path to Enhanced Wellness – A Self-Assessment and Personalized Planning Tool for People with MS” on page 23.

## **Make a plan that works for you**

Neurology professors use an adage to caution their residents against making generalizations about multiple sclerosis: “When you’ve met one person with MS,

you’ve met one person with MS.”

The varied nature of the condition precludes one-size-fits-all approaches – but it also enables you to create a wellness plan tailored to your particular needs and goals. Again, the self-assessment tool on page 23 can help. Dr. Motl recommends that the plan includes attention to what he calls the “trifecta” of good health – exercise, diet, and sleep. “Putting those three things together is key,” he says.

Stephanie L. Silveira, PhD, adds that in pursuing your goals, it’s important to consider not only your specific abilities and challenges but also your personal preferences. “With exercise, for example, find something that is both good for you and that you enjoy doing, which will make you more likely to do it consistently,” says Dr. Silveira, who serves as Assistant Professor in the Department of Management, Policy and Community Health at the UTHealth Houston School of Public Health in Houston, Texas.

Dr. Motl notes that it’s also essential to make an honest assessment of your current



health status when setting your wellness goals and deciding how you will pursue them. “If you haven’t been very active recently, be realistic about where you are and if possible, start by walking for five minutes, and do that for a week or two. You won’t be as tired, stiff, or sore, and over time you can build on that success and steadily increase how long and how far you walk,” he says. For those with limited mobility, the main idea is to start slowly with whatever activity you are able to do, and then gradually increase the duration.



## **Identify and anticipate barriers, while allowing yourself time to take a break when needed**

Good plans allow for the obstacles that can derail them.

Time tops the list of potential pitfalls to be considered. For example, let’s say that you

want to exercise for 30 minutes four-times weekly. That’s great, but can you identify those four, half-hour slots that will always be available for you each week? And if you want to cut back on having take-out food for dinner in favor of making healthier meals at home, how does the prep time required work with the other demands on your evening schedule?

Dr. Silveira notes that people with MS often face another time-related obstacle: decreasing energy levels as the day goes by. “Fatigue is one of the most common symptoms of multiple sclerosis, and if it is a major factor in your life, you need to take it into account as you make plans for exercise, meal prep, or other activities,” she says.

In keeping with the adage, “The morning wins the day,” Dr. Silveira says that one simple approach is to schedule your exercise not long after rising, before other tasks deplete your energy – and perhaps hijack your time.

Dr. Motl explains that some of the biggest barriers people face involve their own perceptions or attitudes, including perfectionism and an “all-or-nothing” mentality.

“Let’s say that you have established a good exercise routine and are really seeing its benefits, but you come down with a cold that is leaving you congested and run down. You can either take a break from exercising and feel better in a few days, or try to push through and maybe require a week or more to recuperate.”

In such situations, he adds, “You need to give yourself the grace and the latitude to back off for a couple of days. Most people with MS are very good at knowing themselves and knowing when something is not right.

“It’s important to pay attention to that sense and to give yourself the rest you need. You can’t feel guilty about taking a couple of days off because your body needs it, but at the same time, you need to have a plan for how you will get going again when you feel better.”

The manifestations of MS are so numerous and nuanced that two people of the same age and gender, with the same form of the condition, and even the same predominant symptoms or Expanded Disability Status Scale (EDSS) score, can have markedly different challenges and abilities. For that reason, Dr. Silveira points out that it is important to keep the focus on what you are doing and to not be discouraged by the perception that someone else may be seeing greater or quicker results.

## SECTION 2

### Involving Both Your Healthcare Team and Those Around You

#### Partner with your provider

With your “why” defined and your “what” sketched out, the next step is to make sure that your plan is just what the doctor ordered – or at least what the doctor approves.

“Any time you’re considering making a major change that will affect your health, it’s important to touch base with your neurologist and, as appropriate, other members of your healthcare team, to tell them what you have in mind and to get their guidance,” Dr. Silveira says.

She notes that clinicians can provide important insights on topics such as tweaking exercise regimens to avoid over-exerting muscles, how planned dietary changes could affect other conditions you may have, and potential drug-to-drug



interactions between over-the-counter supplements and disease-modifying therapies or medications you are taking to treat MS symptoms.

“Consulting your MS provider doesn’t need to entail scheduling an in-person visit just for this purpose, much less waiting for your next regular visit several months down

the road. In most cases, you can use the practice's patient portal to outline your plan and get the clinician's feedback within a couple of days. Alternatively, there's always the 'old school option' of contacting the office to leave a message requesting that the provider call you back," she adds.

MSAA's Chief Medical Officer Dr. Barry Hendin is a neurologist and MS specialist with the Arizona Integrated Neurology MS Center, in Phoenix. Dr. Hendin notes that neurologists welcome and want the opportunity to weigh in on exercise, diet, and other lifestyle changes from the outset – at a time when they can provide expert guidance in advance on effective approaches and flag potentially problematic plans.

Dr. Hendin explains, "We're able to provide patients with a view of the big picture. For example, it's not uncommon for someone with MS to also have one or more chronic conditions, such as diabetes or high blood pressure. The impact that planned changes will have on those other diagnoses has to be considered. However, the good news is that in the great majority of cases, increasing physical activity, improving diet, reducing stress, and taking other steps that are beneficial in terms of MS, also are going to be helpful in managing any additional conditions."

## **Involve those around you and look to them for support**

The people around us can help – or hinder – our plans to make healthy changes.

Dr. Silveira says that ensuring that those people facilitate rather than frustrate our efforts can come down to what she calls "one of the hardest things for all of us to do: engaging in an honest conversation.

"Perhaps someone else in the house handles the grocery shopping and meal preparation and favors foods that you now want to avoid. If you're asking them to make changes that will have an impact on them and others, as well as you, it's important to explain not only what you want to change, but why. You might say something such as, 'I've noticed that when I eat a lot of ultra-processed foods, I have less energy the next day. Maybe you could pick up a pack of small carrots that I could munch on instead of crackers or cookies,'" she says.

Sleep environment is imperative for everyone, but it is an area where alignment between spouses or partners is particularly important. "The other person may want to keep the phone on the nightstand, but if it buzzes or lights up each time a notification arrives, that can interfere with your ability to get to sleep and stay asleep," Dr. Silveira says.

She adds that room temperature and light levels should also be discussed, explaining the reasons for such changes during these discussions.

Enlisting the support of loved ones and friends, however, isn't all a matter of explanation and negotiation. Your pursuit of enhanced wellness also provides an opportunity to enjoy more time with the people in your life – have a friend be your walking

buddy or plan the week's meals with a spouse or partner over a cup of coffee. Besides, as Dr. Silveira notes, the steps that you are taking to enjoy better health – such as exercising more or eating more fruits and vegetables – offer benefits to those who adopt them with you.

Also, introduce your health insurance plan to your wellness plan. That is, contact

your insurer or managed care organization and see if they will cover one-time or ongoing consultation with a dietitian, exercise physiologist, physical therapist, or social worker. Similarly, some plans will provide partial reimbursement for gym memberships or have other features to support members' well-being.

## SECTION 3

# Exercise, Diet, Sleeping Well, and Caring for Your Mind and Spirit, Are Just What the Doctor Ordered!

## Putting your wellness plan in motion – literally

MS is a whole-person condition, and Dr. Motl wants people with MS to appreciate that physical activity offers whole-person benefits. He says, “Exercise is a very powerful behavior that targets and influences nearly every physiological system in the human body. Because of that, exercise exerts many life-changing benefits for people with multiple sclerosis.

“If we start with the most obvious thing, exercise improves aerobic fitness and muscle strength, both of which are reduced in people with MS. Improvements in those two aspects of health enable people to do so much more in their lives. If you have more muscle strength, it can be easier to go up and down stairs, get in and out of a car, and carry your groceries into your house. If you have greater aerobic capacity, you have greater endurance for every single thing you

do in daily life.”

The exercise physiologist explains that exercise has a sort of positive domino effect for people with MS. “As you become more aerobically fit and have greater muscle strength, that translates into reductions in fatigue. Reduced fatigue translates into improvement in depression, exercise capacity, daily physical activity, and cognition. As a result, the benefits of exercise ultimately extend all the way to quality of life. People with MS who exercise regularly have been shown to have better self-perceived quality of life than those who don't engage in exercise,” he says.

Dr. Motl emphasizes that people with MS can – and should – draw upon evidence-based guidance when embarking on an exercise program.

He explains that the non-profit organization MS Canada has published guidelines grounded in the scientific literature.<sup>1</sup> Dr. Motl adds that those



guidelines recommend that adults with MS who are aged 18-64 years old and who have a mild to moderate degree of disability need at least:

- 30 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity two times a week
- Strength training exercises for major muscle groups two times per week

“The Canadian guidelines emphasize gradually increasing your level of physical activity and recommend resting your muscles for at least one day between strength training workouts. However, per the guidelines, aerobic and strength training can be done on the same day,” he notes, adding that the guidelines provide examples of appropriate activities.

But what about people with MS who have a greater degree of disability? An international panel of experts in exercise

and MS provided recommendations informed by both the evidence and panelists’ professional opinions.<sup>2</sup>

These recommendations offer guidance across the MS disease course, with key messages and strategies for people with various Expanded Disability Status Scale (EDSS) scores. For example, for people with an EDSS score of 8.0 to 8.5, which reflects increasing difficulty performing activities of daily living and the need to use a wheelchair, the recommendations detail breathing exercises, stretches to support flexibility, core-strengthening exercises, and other activities.

“The point is that while you have to be mindful of your abilities and limitations and follow your MS provider’s guidance, there is always something you can do,” says Dr. Motl, who served on the expert panel. He adds that there is always a place you can exercise.

“Some people like to go to the gym because they find it motivating and they like the social interaction, but it’s perfectly okay to exercise at home. You can get some resistance bands or hand weights for strength training. You can do squats or chair stands – an exercise that involves slowly standing up from a chair and slowly sitting back down – and build a lot of strength in your quadricep muscles without any special equipment. And when possible, walking outside is another good option” he says. For individuals with limited mobility or strength, gentle exercises while sitting or even in a reclined position can be of great benefit.



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The MIND diet draws on both the Mediterranean diet and another diet plan termed Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension, or DASH. Reflecting this combination, MIND is an abbreviation for Mediterranean-DASH Intervention for Neurodegenerative Delay.

Key components of the MIND diet include an emphasis on berries because of their antioxidant properties and on green, leafy vegetables because of their abundant nutrients, as well as a recommendation to eat fish at least once a week. Both the Mediterranean and MIND diets recommend limiting sweets and red meat.

A recent study involving more than 3,700 people with MS found that those who followed the MIND diet for several years had less disability, less fatigue, and a higher quality of life than those who did not follow the diet.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, an analysis of seven studies involving more than 1,100 people with MS found that following the Mediterranean diet was associated with reduced relapse rates and less disability relative to other dietary practices.<sup>7</sup>

Dr. Hendin notes that many other diets and eating plans have been proposed by their supporters for people with MS. However, no specific diet is definitively recommended for MS. He says that while research continues to explore the impact of those approaches, following a few simple rules makes sense:

- Avoid processed foods as much as possible.

- Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables.
- Beware of fads, and of centering your diet around any one food.
- Choose healthy foods that taste good to you and mix up your menu throughout the week.

Dr. Silveira notes that your diet, like your exercise regimen, needs to work within the context of your larger life. If your schedule or your energy level doesn't allow you to make dinner seven nights a week, make dinner when you can, and pick up salads rather than a pizza on a night when you can't make dinner.

Dr. Motl warns against another mindset that can be self-defeating: "Just because you're exercising, it doesn't mean you can eat anything you want. You want physical activity and good nutrition to work together to make your body better," he says.

## **Have a sound strategy for sound sleep**

Both Dr. Motl and Dr. Silveira emphasize that the importance of a balanced approach extends beyond the mix of exercises you perform and the variety of foods you eat. They explain that it also means pairing physical activity with adequate sleep.

"When you're working your body harder, it needs more rest and recovery. I know it can be hard to get a good night's sleep, but when you're increasing your physical activity and making healthy dietary changes, enhancing sleep rounds out the trifecta," Dr. Motl says.

However, multiple sclerosis can pose as many challenges to sound sleep as it does to regular exercise. A recent analysis of 44 studies involving more than 7,000 people with MS found that 49.5% reported sleep disorders, including insomnia, obstructive sleep apnea, and restless leg syndrome.<sup>8</sup>



Dr. Silveira recommends a multi-faceted approach to addressing those challenges. She notes that while the approach is pertinent to all people, many of the steps are particularly important to those with MS because of the condition's symptoms. Those steps include:

- Being physically active during the day
- Spending at least some time each day outdoors in the natural light
- Transitioning away from screens – on your phone, laptop, or television – an hour or more before bed
- Stopping fluid intake a few hours before bed to reduce the need to use the bathroom overnight
- Limiting caffeine intake throughout the day, both to help get to sleep and to not have sleep interrupted due to a full bladder

As noted earlier in this article, creating the right sleep environment is also key, according to Dr. Silveira, noting that this

means resting in a dark room. “I know we’re all tethered to our mobile phones, but it’s important to put the phone some place where it won’t wake you every time a notification arrives,” she explains, adding that a comfortable room temperature is also important given the heat sensitivity that many people with MS experience.

A breathing exercise or brief meditation can help, as can playing calming music or “white noise” (think ocean waves or soft rain). “Choose the options that work for you, but the idea is to have a routine that sets you up for a good night’s sleep,” Dr. Silveira says.

Contrary to what you might assume, the fatigue that is a common hallmark of multiple sclerosis can be an impediment to good sleep, the exercise physiologist notes. Dr. Silveira explains that napping during the day to allay fatigue can leave one awake at night. “By all means, if you need to rest in the late morning or the afternoon because fatigue has sapped your energy, do so, but try to keep naps to 20 to 45 minutes, and if possible, avoid napping after 4 pm.”

Restless leg syndrome (RLS) is another frequent interference to getting a good night's sleep for people with MS, she adds. "We don't tend to think of RLS as a sleep disorder, but it actually is because it occurs much more frequently during sleep than when people are awake," Dr. Silveira says. Further, research has shown that RLS is two-to-four-times more common in people with MS than in the general population,<sup>9, 10</sup> with studies reporting that at least 21% to 30% of people with MS are affected by the syndrome.<sup>8, 11</sup>

Talking with your MS clinician or primary care provider about tactics for dealing with RLS is important, says Dr. Silveira. While the spasticity that is a hallmark of MS is distinct from RLS, it can have a similar negative impact on sleep and also warrants discussion with a neurologist or other MS specialist, she notes. "If your provider has prescribed a muscle relaxant such as baclofen, he or she may have some helpful strategies in terms of doses or the timing of when you take the medicine," she explains.

Dr. Silveira emphasizes that it is also important to talk with your clinician if you are considering taking any over-the-counter sleep aid, supplement, or herbal preparation. "You want to get professional input on the safety and efficacy of the product. You also want to see if there are better, non-medication alternatives to dealing with your sleep challenges," she says.



### **Care for your mind and spirit, as well as your body**

Researchers report that more than one-quarter of people with MS suffer from depression and that more than one-third will experience anxiety at some point in the course of the disease.<sup>12</sup>

Given the high prevalence of those disorders, and the toll that MS takes on people living with the disease, efforts to enhance wellness need to incorporate attention to mental and emotional health as well as physical status.

For some, that may mean seeing a mental health professional for assessment and for any indicated counseling or medication. In other cases, attending to emotional well-being may primarily be a matter of practicing stress-reduction techniques or yoga, meditation or prayer, mindfulness exercises, or cultivating a positive mindset.

A growing body of small but promising studies shows that many of those approaches can yield documented benefits. One study involving 61 people with MS found that participating in four weeks of mindfulness-based training helped participants regulate their emotions, worry less, and improve working memory as well as cognitive processing speed.<sup>13, 14</sup>

In another study that enrolled 23 people with MS, completing an eight-week mindfulness program was associated with reduced anxiety, depression, fatigue, and loneliness. Further, 13 study participants who had magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans before and after the program had an increase in brain tissue volume, which is a significant finding.<sup>15</sup>

Dr. Silveira notes that in addition to practices to enhance emotional well-being, and when warranted, working with a mental health professional, it's important to have adequate social interaction. "Loneliness is a

real problem for so many people today, and MS can be isolating for a host of reasons, from challenges with mobility and transportation to a sense that others can't understand what you're experiencing," she explains.

In-person or virtual MS support groups are a great means of interacting with others who can relate to what you're going through, but Dr. Silveira says that it is also beneficial to engage with people in other settings and for other reasons.

"People should be involved in activities that bring them joy," she says, noting that this could involve a favorite hobby or activity, spending time with a community organization or faith-based group, a monthly lunch reunion with former co-workers, or just picking up the phone and chatting with someone you haven't talked to recently.

### **Assess, adjust, acknowledge**

Dr. Silveira notes that establishing and maintaining a wellness routine is important, but so is occasionally evaluating how well that routine is meeting your needs. She says, "Both in life generally and in following a wellness plan, you want to avoid the mindset that so long as the car starts when you turn on the ignition and moves when you put it in drive, you can ignore the flashing lights on the dashboard or the strange sounds coming from the engine." Instead, the exercise physiologist notes that regular "tune-ups" can keep you on the road to your destination.

Dr. Silveira continues that this may mean swapping out one form of exercise that has become tedious for a more enjoyable



alternative, increasing your walking time as your stamina improves, or adding a new relaxation technique to your strategy for emotional well-being. The key, she adds, is to tailor your wellness efforts both to where you are now and to your goals – which in MS sometimes may be to maintain, rather than to

increase, current levels of physical activity and function.

And just as important as those periodic assessments and adjustments, she adds, is acknowledging your efforts and giving yourself credit for all that you are doing to enhance your wellness and enrich your life. ■

## References

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Numerous websites, publications, videos, apps, support groups, online communities, and other resources are available to support individuals with MS and their pursuit of enhanced wellness.

MSSA and other advocacy organizations have produced numerous materials developed by or in consultation with physicians and other healthcare professionals. Examples of these materials are listed below.

### *Apps*

MSSA's award-winning My MS Manager™ mobile app, which is provided free of charge to people with MS or their care partners, can be downloaded on both Android and Apple iOS mobile devices.



Developed in conjunction with @Point of Care, this first-of-its-kind app for MS offers individuals a convenient and effective tool for managing the ever-changing course of the disease. Features of My MS Manager include:

- A daily journal for logging symptoms, blood pressure and weight, physical activity, and personal notes
- Health measurement scales that track fatigue, depression, bladder patterns, and cognitive abilities
- The option to generate charts and reports across various metrics such as treatments, moods, symptoms, and more
- Links to additional educational materials from MSSA

Other HIPAA-compliant features include optional private reminder settings and the ability to connect to physicians and other clinicians on your care team via the app to share your progress and reports securely and as needed. Please visit [mymsaa.org/mobile](https://mymsaa.org/mobile) for more information.

Beyond apps developed specifically for people living with MS, mobile phones typically record and can provide information on step count, walk steadiness and stride, and stairs climbed. Wearable health devices (e.g., Fitbit® or the Oura® Ring) can provide additional information, including details on sleep patterns, stress levels, and more.

### *Videos and webinars*

Educational videos can also be useful resources. Those videos with the most reliable information are produced by medical societies, non-profit advocacy groups, well-known healthcare institutions or board-certified physicians, and other healthcare professionals with expertise in MS.

For example, earlier this year, MSSA produced the webinar, “The Long Game: Lifestyle Medicine & MS.” This webinar features a wealth of practical, scientifically sound advice from Lisa Doggett, MD, MPH, a board-certified family and lifestyle medicine specialist practicing at UT Health Austin’s Multiple Sclerosis and Neuroimmunology Center. The webinar can be viewed at <https://mymsaa.org/videos/the-long-game-lifestyle-medicine-ms/>.

## ***Websites and publications***

Once more, the challenge isn't finding information about wellness and MS online or in print, it's selecting current, pertinent, and accurate information available through an internet search.

MSAA's website, **mymsaa.org**, offers many resources, from access to videos, webinars, and podcasts, to extensive content on everything from symptoms and their management to our Ultimate MS Treatment Guide (an interactive tool for learning about and comparing the different disease-modifying therapies). In addition, other sections include our My MSAA Community peer-to-peer online forum as well as our MS Conversations blog.

While on our website, you'll also find a variety of publications, including several issues of this magazine, *The Motivator*; *About MS*, a comprehensive overview of MS and its treatments; *MS Relapse Toolkit*, a booklet explaining ways to prepare for and minimize the effects of a relapse; and more. In addition, MSAA offers "What's New in MS Research," a bimonthly online article providing research updates.

## ***Being a savvy consumer of MS information***

It is important to "consider the source" and to assess the quality of information being provided. Ask yourself:

- What qualifications do the authors or speakers possess?
- Is the sponsoring organization a medical society (e.g., the American Academy of Neurology), non-profit advocacy organization, MS center or clinician, or a for-profit entity? (Of course, businesses provide many valuable products and services for people with MS, so for-profit status isn't a reason to dismiss information from such sources. It is, however, important to be aware of who is providing the information.)
- How current is the information? Does it disclose when it was published, posted, or updated?
- Is the advice being offered broadly consistent with what you are seeing and hearing from other sources?
- Are any claims supported by references to articles published in scientific journals, recommendations from reputable organizations, or government health agencies? And do those claims seem realistic? Because, as you know, "If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is."

Finally, before making any significant changes in your wellness strategy – particularly in terms of starting over-the-counter supplements, herbal preparations, or similar products – consult with your healthcare team, who remain your best source of information on multiple sclerosis. ■

## ***Adopting a Healthy Diet Plan***

In terms of identifying good eating habits and the best diet for MS, advocates of various eating plans and researchers assessing those plans tend to agree on two things:

- Avoid processed foods as much as possible
- Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables, although some diet plans carry important caveats about which types of vegetables to eat

MCAA's Chief Medical Officer Barry Hendin, MD, explains, "We know, from extensive research, that the Mediterranean diet reduces cardiovascular risk and improves general health, and we think, from early and continuing research, that it also

improves MS symptoms. Actually, many of the diets that are of interest to people with MS right now, such as the Mediterranean diet or the Wahls Protocol, emphasize a lot of these foods, although each eating plan differs in important ways," he says.

Dr. Hendin adds that while studies still need to establish the full benefits and potential drawbacks of specific diets in MS, the weight of the evidence supporting the advantages of healthy eating has changed the way he counsels patients. "I used to say that adopting healthy eating patterns would improve their prognosis over the long term, 10 or 20 years down the line. I still tell patients that, but now I've seen enough data to tell them that good nutrition also will help them feel better now, in terms of fatigue and other conditions."

The preceding excerpts are from the cover story, "The Importance of Diet and Nutrition in MS," appearing in MCAA's Summer/Fall 2023 issue of *The Motivator*. For more information, please refer to this edition at [mymsaa.org/publications/motivator/summer-fall23](https://mymsaa.org/publications/motivator/summer-fall23)

## ***A Quick Overview of Specific Diet Plans***

When looking at different dietary options, experts say that it is valuable to talk with your MS clinician and/or primary care provider about how well a particular diet is suited to your overall health needs. It's also important to think about how easy or difficult a particular diet is to follow over the long term.

And finally, beware of fads, extreme diets, and diets making claims that cannot be supported by study results.

You do not have to follow a specific diet in order to practice healthy eating. For those interested in learning more about different diet plans, a number of common approaches are described on the following pages.

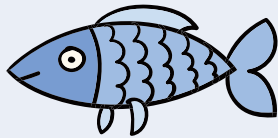
## ***Vegetarian or Vegan Diets***

Definitions vary, but as a general rule, vegetarians do not eat meat, poultry, game or fish, including shellfish, while vegans not only avoid those items, but also do not eat any other food products that come from animals, such as eggs, milk, and butter. Fruits and vegetables are a large part of these diets, which include soy, beans, and legumes.



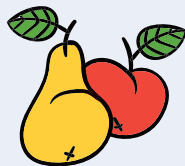
## ***Mediterranean Diet***

This eating plan emphasizes plant-based foods, including vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans and other legumes, nuts, herbs, and olive oil. Fish is also a key component. Small amounts of poultry, eggs, and dairy are other sources of animal protein, while red meat is limited. Moderate consumption of wine with meals is allowed.



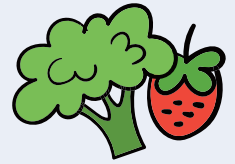
## ***DASH Diet***

Like the Mediterranean diet, the DASH plan calls for people to center their diet on vegetables, fruits, whole grains, fish, poultry, beans, and nuts. It also entails reduced consumption of red meat, sodium, and foods and drinks with added sugars.



## ***MIND Diet***

This eating plan emphasizes eating the vegetables, fruits, nuts, whole grains, and other items in its “parent” diets (the Mediterranean and DASH diets), while significantly limiting red meat, fried foods, sweets and pastries, and butter.



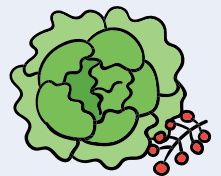
## ***The SWANK Diet***

The diet calls for avoiding processed foods containing saturated fats or hydrogenated oils, no red meats during the first year on the diet, and only three ounces of red meat per week thereafter. Skinless white-meat poultry, white fish, and low-fat dairy products are permitted. People are encouraged to eat whole grain breads, rice, and pasta, and as many servings of fruits and vegetables as they wish.



## ***The Wahls Protocol Diet***

This approach emphasizes consumption of vegetables (particularly leafy greens), berries and other brightly colored fruits, meat and fish, and omega-3 fatty acids, plus other fat from animals and plants. People following this diet steer clear of sugar; dairy products and eggs; tomatoes, potatoes, and other “nightshade” vegetables; legumes, such as beans; and grains, such as wheat or rice.



## ***Anti-Inflammatory Diets***

Like the Mediterranean and DASH diets, eating plans focused on reducing inflammation include abundant fruits and vegetables. Minimally refined, high-fiber whole grains, coffee and tea, herbs, and dark chocolate with a high percentage of cocoa solids are also components of these diets, which allow for moderate amounts of beer or wine. In addition, these diets place an emphasis on monounsaturated fats, such as those found in nuts, seeds, olive oil, and avocados, as well as polyunsaturated omega-3 fats, which are found in salmon, sardines, other fish, and walnuts.



## ***Gluten-Free Diets***

Gluten is a protein found in some cereal grains, such as wheat, rye, and barley. While avoiding gluten is essential for people with celiac disease, research has not shown gluten to play a role in multiple sclerosis development or course, or to be detrimental to people with MS.



*As a reminder, no specific diet is recommended for individuals with MS. Please be sure to consult your physician before making any changes to your diet. ■*

The preceding information originally appeared in the cover story, “A Closer Look at Diet and MS,” published in MSAA’s Winter/Spring 2024 issue of *The Motivator*. For more details on these diet plans and how they might relate to MS, please refer to this edition at [mymsaa.org/publications/motivator/winter-spring24](https://mymsaa.org/publications/motivator/winter-spring24)

Connect with others and find support on

# **My MSAA Community**

Join more than 10,200 members who have similar experiences with multiple sclerosis in this online peer-to-peer forum.

[healthunlocked.com/msaa](https://healthunlocked.com/msaa)



## *A Self-Assessment and Personalized Planning Tool for People with MS*

Most of us could benefit by re-examining different aspects of our health and well-being, with the goal of working on those areas that you feel may need improvement. To get off to a strong start, it makes sense to initially concentrate on just one or two areas.

**Where are you now – and how difficult or easy will it be to make changes?** Using the values of (1) very good, (2) good, (3) fair, (4) needs work, or (5) not good, rate each of the following health-related areas according to where you currently are:

- Exercise/physical activity
- Diet/nutrition
- Sleep
- Emotional well-being
- Social interaction
- Other aspects of well-being important to you

**Consider where you want to begin.** A good “first focus” might be an area where you can achieve real gains without having to overcome particularly daunting obstacles. In other words, identify those areas that perhaps have a difficulty level of “3” (fair) or better, so making the desired change will be easier to accomplish.

**After selecting an area to work on, write down your “why.”** Having a clear sense of your reasons for wanting to improve certain areas of your well-being is critical for finding the determination to keep going when the going gets tough.

**Spell out your “what.”** This is what you hope to achieve. List not just the outcome you want to see but your process for reaching it. For instance, if your goal is to make healthier meal choices, you might pursue this by speaking with your family about meal choices, removing unhealthy snacks, and reducing how often you order fast food.

**Identify potential pitfalls** – and ways around them. You’ll need to look at what attitudes, physical challenges, and other factors of your own that you need to address, and can others around you either help or hinder your plans? Other questions to ask yourself is if you’ll be able to incorporate your plans into your current daily schedule, and are any resources needed – such as information or equipment?

**Consult your MS provider.** Great job! You’ve identified your areas of priority, your motivation, and your plans for proceeding. But before you start, share this plan with your healthcare providers and make any modifications based on their guidance.

**And, finally, consider three important points:** What is your plan for getting back on track promptly if you need to take a break? What is your plan for periodically assessing your progress and making adjustments, if needed? And, what can you do periodically to acknowledge and honor the commitment you have made to enhancing your well-being?

**Good work! You’re now ready to make positive changes to your life. ■**

# Questions from Our Readers



**By Dr. Barry Hendin**

MSAA's Chief Medical Officer

**Q: I have had MS symptoms for many years. Tests have shown some evidence of MS, but as of 2024, a diagnosis could not be confirmed. Would you please explain the details of the McDonald criteria and what has changed with the recent update?**

**A:** The goal in diagnosing multiple sclerosis is to make the correct diagnosis as early as possible, since evidence suggests that prompt treatment with a disease-modifying therapy favorably affects the prognosis for relapses and for disability progression.

The goal of the McDonald criteria 2024 revision is to allow clinicians to make an accurate diagnosis as early as possible while avoiding the errors of a misdiagnosis. The earliest criteria considered is the requirement for attacks to be “disseminated in time and space,” or in other words, the attacks must occur at different times to different parts of the central nervous system. The evolving criteria make greater use of technology in addition to the clinical manifestations of multiple sclerosis.

The most recent revision in 2024 acknowledges the optic nerve as one of the locations in which an attack can occur in

“space.” It includes advanced MRI imaging techniques such as the finding of veins in the center of MS lesions (central vein sign) and also iron deposition at the edge of MS lesions (paramagnetic rim lesions).

In addition to oligoclonal bands found in the spinal fluid, the new criteria for diagnosis include a second biomarker, kappa free light chains. The new criteria also include patients who have the appropriate MRI findings, even if they've never had an MS attack.

Described as radiologically isolated syndrome, or “RIS,” prior to these new criteria, a diagnosis of MS could not be confirmed until symptoms appeared. However, with these new criteria, a portion of those who would have previously been diagnosed with RIS, may now be diagnosed with confirmed MS, depending on their specific MRI and biomarker findings.

Our criteria for making the diagnosis of MS evolve as our understanding and technology evolve. This will not be the last McDonald criteria revision or the last diagnostic criteria. This represents the progress we've made in diagnosing MS earlier and more accurately.

Please email questions for  
**Ask the Doctor** to [askdr@mymsaa.org](mailto:askdr@mymsaa.org)

**Q: I have a granddaughter with MS and I'm trying to learn more about the disease and its treatments. Could you please tell me if any research has been directed at preventing the immune cells from getting past the blood-brain barrier?**

**A:** First, it may be helpful to define the blood-brain barrier (BBB). The blood-brain barrier is composed of protective layers of cells lining our blood vessels and our brain. Its function is to filter out and deny entry to harmful toxins and pathogens, including viruses and bacteria. Multiple sclerosis can weaken the blood-brain barrier and allow immune cells in, which can attack the central nervous system (consisting of the brain, spinal cord, and optic nerves).

Our current disease-modifying therapies work by multiple mechanisms. Some modulate the level of inflammation, while others may sequester immune cells away from the brain, spinal cord, and optic nerves. Alternatively, some may limit the reproduction of those immune cells or even destroy the immune cells. (Please note that the FDA reminds us to maintain a degree of skepticism when we discuss mechanisms, because the full array of mechanisms may become clearer in the future.)

Regarding your question, Tysabri® (natalizumab) and the interferons – Avonex® (interferon beta-1a), Betaseron® (interferon beta-1b), Plegridy® (peginterferon beta-1a), and Rebif® (interferon beta-1a) – act on the blood-brain barrier directly. Tysabri prevents activated immune cells from adhering to the blood vessel wall, reducing the immune cells ability to enter the brain. Interferons act to stabilize the blood-brain barrier. Most of our current medications are not able to cross the blood-brain barrier and treat multiple sclerosis in the bloodstream.

Mavenclad® (cladribine) and the S1P modulators – Gilenya® (fingolimod, FTY720), Mayzent® (siponimod), Ponvory® (ponesimod), and Zeposia® (ozanimod) – have a limited ability to cross the blood-brain barrier. An emerging class of therapies (BTK inhibitors) has an excellent ability to penetrate through the blood-brain barrier and may be able to reduce smoldering brain inflammation directly!

We have been blessed with a variety of medications, which work by various mechanisms. And we expect the progress with therapies to continue! ■

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*Barry A. Hendin, MD, is a highly accomplished neurologist who specializes in MS. He is the chief medical officer for the Multiple Sclerosis Association of America (MSAA) and has spoken at several of MSAA's educational programs. After 45 years as a neurologist with Phoenix Neurological Associates, Ltd., Dr. Hendin is now director of the Arizona Integrated Neurology MS Center. He is also director of the Multiple Sclerosis Clinic at Banner University Medical Center and clinical professor of neurology at the University of Arizona Medical School.*

# Recent News and Study Updates in MS Research

By Tom Garry

Edited by Susan Wells Courtney

Reviewed by Dr. Barry A. Hendin

MCAA Chief Medical Officer

## MCAA's MSIN<sup>®</sup> Initiative Assesses the Evidence for a Wide Range of MS Interventions Beyond DMTs

While extremely important, comprehensive management of MS entails far more than taking disease-modifying therapies (DMTs). Health promotion, attention to symptoms, and supportive care all play critical roles, but often are not as rigorously studied as DMTs, which must be evaluated in large clinical trials to receive United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval. As a result, it can be difficult for people with MS and their clinicians to know which other interventions have solid evidence supporting their efficacy and safety.

As an initial step toward bridging that evidence gap, the Multiple Sclerosis Implementation Network<sup>®</sup> (MSIN<sup>®</sup>) conducted a scoping review to assess the breadth and focus of research into various facets of MS management.<sup>1</sup> “A scoping review is useful to map the literature on evolving or emerging topics and to identify gaps.”<sup>2</sup>

MCAA's MSIN initiative evaluated 1,049 articles in medical and scientific journals

before identifying 208 studies that met its inclusion criteria. Those studies were authored by researchers in 33 countries, with the United States, Iran, Italy, Turkey, and Spain accounting for 69% of the studies.

The five most frequently studied aspects of MS outside of DMTs were symptom management (53.8%), motor function and disability (44.2%), activities of daily living (29.3%), cognitive function (21.2%), and psychological well-being (20.2%). In terms of the types of interventions evaluated, exercise led the way, representing 47.6% of the studies.

Roughly 14% of studies looked at multi-component interventions, such as programs that combined education, rehabilitation, exercise, and brain stimulation. Dietary and nutritional interventions constituted the least-researched area, being the focus of only 1.4% of studies. The authors of the scoping review noted that most of the evidence-based interventions evaluated were developed by

*Medical details and study results provided in MCAA's published materials are for informational purposes only and are not to be considered as treatment advice or recommendations. Readers are encouraged to consult a healthcare professional before making any changes to their current treatment regimen.*

single research teams without independent replication, a detail that is critical for validating study data.

As a next step from the scoping review, “each intervention will be prioritized based on the strength of the evidence, potential impact on patient outcomes, alignment with patient and stakeholder priorities, and feasibility of adoption and implementation across MSIN [clinical] sites.”<sup>1</sup>

By carefully assessing and implementing various health promotion, symptom management, and supportive steps in this manner, MSIN’s effort can help drive adoption of truly comprehensive MS care. ■

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## Sandoz Announces Launch of Tyruko®

Tyruko® (natalizumab-sztn), the first approved biosimilar for the long-term treatment of multiple sclerosis (MS), is now available in the United States. Marketed by Sandoz, Tyruko is a biosimilar to Tysabri® (natalizumab), and as with Tysabri, Tyruko is approved to treat relapsing forms of MS.

Because it is a biosimilar to Tysabri, Tyruko is given at the same dosage and via the same administration as Tysabri (IV infusion every four weeks), while also carrying the same benefits and risks. A rare but serious risk of Tysabri, as well as certain other immunosuppressants, is the development of progressive multifocal leukoencephalopathy (PML), an often-fatal viral infection of the brain. Caused by the John Cunningham virus (JCV), the risk of developing PML can be reduced by testing for JCV antibodies in advance.

Although Tyruko was originally approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in 2023, the November 2025 launch of Tyruko was initially delayed as the makers waited for the approval of a JCV antibody test.

Similar to Tysabri, Tyruko is available through a Risk Evaluation and Mitigation Strategy (REMS) program to inform healthcare providers and patients about the risk of PML associated with this treatment. Sandoz has partnered with Labcorp in developing this JCV testing, and Sandoz will cover the cost for eligible patients. ■

## Trio of MS Medication Trials Yield Disappointing Results

The closing weeks of 2025 brought news of three MS medication studies that did not meet their primary endpoints.

In the first study, dubbed **MS-STAT2**, British researchers examined whether the cholesterol medication **simvastatin** could slow disability progression in secondary-progressive multiple sclerosis (SPMS).<sup>3</sup> A Phase II study lent support to this idea by showing that people with SPMS taking simvastatin daily had less brain atrophy over time than others with SPMS who received placebo.

On the basis of those findings, the British researchers proceeded to the Phase III, randomized, MS-STAT2 study, which involved 964 people with SPMS. Unfortunately, as reported in October in the *Lancet* medical journal, the study did not show simvastatin to be beneficial in reducing six-month confirmed disability progression (CDP), which occurred in 36% of people in the placebo group and 40% of those receiving simvastatin.

Late November brought news that **PIPE-307**, an investigational medication being developed by Contineum Therapeutics, did not meet its primary or secondary efficacy endpoints in the Phase II **VISTA** trial assessing its use in people with relapsing-remitting MS.<sup>4</sup> PIPE-307 belongs to a class of medications known as M1 receptor antagonists. These medications block the neurotransmitter acetylcholine at muscarinic M1 receptors in the central nervous system (CNS), which can have an impact on nerve signaling.

And finally, in December, the French biopharmaceutical company Sanofi announced that the Phase III **PERSEUS** study evaluating its investigational medication tolebrutinib did not meet its primary endpoint of delaying time to six-month composite confirmed disability progression (cCDP) in study participants with primary-progressive multiple sclerosis (PPMS). Tolebrutinib is an investigational, oral, brain-penetrant Bruton's tyrosine kinase inhibitor specifically designed to target smoldering neuroinflammation, a key driver of disability progression in MS.

Although Sanofi will no longer pursue regulatory registration of tolebrutinib for PPMS given these disappointing study results,<sup>5</sup> they are continuing to seek approval of tolebrutinib for use in non-relapsing secondary-progressive MS (nrSPMS). However, while a decision on whether to approve tolebrutinib for use in nrSPMS was expected in December from the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA), they instead issued a complete response letter asking Sanofi to provide more data to support its application for the approval.<sup>6</sup>

While these developments would seem to affirm the notion that “bad news comes in threes,” there undoubtedly are silver linings within the findings from all three studies in terms of data points and patterns that can help researchers refine approaches, shift focus, and hopefully achieve better results going forward. ■

# Launching a Collaborative Path Forward in MS Care

By Susan Wells Courtney

Established in Arizona and led by MSAA's Chief Medical Officer Barry Hendin, MD, in partnership with the Multiple Sclerosis Association of America, the **AZ MS Forum** is launching a dedicated co-learning space where clinicians, payers (insurance companies), and policymakers work together to address barriers to high-quality multiple sclerosis (MS) care. The Forum's inaugural phase included a symposium, in-person and web-based meetings, and a survey to identify evolving challenges and opportunities across the care continuum.

Through this process, stakeholders identified and prioritized leading themes. Stakeholders included lived experience advocates (people living with MS) who have backgrounds in nursing and insurance, MS experts in care, MS clinicians, health insurance system leaders, medical and employment organization leadership, holistic health clinicians, community organizations, pharmacists, and research leaders at the University of Arizona.

Themes identified included economic and policy barriers such as prior authorization delays and funding constraints; underutilized telehealth driven by reimbursement limitations; workforce shortages contributing to delayed diagnosis and follow-up; fragmented care pathways (delays in seeing the appropriate specialists) and navigation

gaps (gaps in care coordination as patients move between providers); and broader system disconnects, including unmet mental health needs and inequities affecting underserved communities.

Building on these insights, the next phase of the AZ MS Forum will focus on developing an action-oriented roadmap, which will translate ideas cultivated through the findings into practical, collaborative interventions to strengthen coordination, access, and outcomes for people living with MS. ■

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## MSAA's Helpline

If you are looking for emotional support, answers to your questions, or vital resources, our Client Services Specialists are available and can be reached through our Helpline: **(800) 532-7667, extension 154** or via email at **MSquestions@mymxaa.org**.

Helpline hours are Monday through Friday, 8:30 AM to 8:00 PM Eastern.

To reach a Spanish-speaking Client Services Specialist, please call **(800) 532-7667, extension 131**. Para comunicarse con un Especialista de Servicios al Cliente que habla español, llame al **(800) 532-7667, extensión 131** o envíe un correo electrónico a **MSquestions@mymxaa.org**.

El horario de la línea de ayuda es de lunes a viernes, de 8:30 AM a 8:00 PM, hora del este. ■



## IN MEMORIAM: Andrew Woo, MD, PhD

MSAA and the MS community are mourning the loss of a truly wonderful neurologist and friend, Dr. Andrew Woo, who passed away on November 14, 2025. Dr. Woo initially assisted MSAA as a speaker at several educational programs for people living with MS as well as programs specifically for healthcare professionals. He was elected to MSAA's Board of Directors and served in that role for many years, playing a crucial role in providing valuable guidance for MSAA's most notable programs.

Dr. Woo was in private practice at Santa Monica Neurological Consultants in Santa Monica, California, and served as an Assistant Clinical Professor of Neurology at the David

Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA and Cedars-Sinai Medical Center. In addition to his awards for teaching, he has been named on several occasions as one of America's Top Physicians by the Consumer Research Council of America and other healthcare-evaluating organizations.

Dr. Woo was not only extremely knowledgeable on a wealth of topics, but was also uniquely kind and generous. His passion for life, sense of humor, and incredible spirit will live on in everyone fortunate enough to have known him. Our thoughts and deepest condolences go out to Dr. Woo's family and friends. He will be greatly missed by all of us at MSAA. ■

### MSAA's Podcasts, Educational Videos, and Webinars

At MSAA, we know that providing valuable information on a wide range of topics – from diagnosis and treatments to healthy lifestyles and family relationships – is critical to the health and well-being of the entire MS community. MSAA provides this information through easy-to-access podcast episodes, videos, as well as live and recorded webinars featuring healthcare professionals and individuals living with MS.

During MS Awareness Month in March, we featured a two-part podcast series, "Beyond the Chart: Strengthening Self-Advocacy Through Communication." These podcast

episodes focus on communication between individuals living with MS and healthcare providers to support a shared decision-making process. The series may be accessed by going to **MyMSAA.org/podcasts**.

In addition, MSAA's educational video, "Advocacy Starts with You," explores how individuals living with MS can advocate for themselves within their families, communities, and healthcare teams. This video, and our full library of educational videos and webinars, may be accessed at **MyMSAA.org/videos**.

We hope you take advantage of MSAA's informative online resources! ■

# MSAA's 12th Improving Lives Benefit

By Susan Wells Courtney

On Thursday, May 7th, we will be holding our largest fundraising event of the year: MSAA's 12th Improving Lives Benefit, which raises vital funds to support MSAA's free programs and services... bringing together the many different individuals who play crucial roles within the MS community... and raising awareness of our urgent mission of improving lives today for all those affected by MS.

A highlight of the event is the recognition of two honorees. We are very proud to announce that this year's Mission Honoree is Tyler Campbell, an MS advocate, best-selling author, and well-known inspirational speaker. We are also pleased to announce that this year's Corporate Honoree is icometrix, a company that has built FDA-cleared AI software that analyzes brain scans of people with neurological conditions including multiple sclerosis, helping clinicians and people living with MS make better-informed decisions.

MSAA's Improving Lives Benefit is an exciting event for the entire MS community, including individuals with MS, healthcare professionals, and our supporters. The Improving Lives Benefit will take place at The Switch House in Philadelphia and will also be livestreamed for people to access from the comfort of their home. ■



**Please join us for MSAA's 12th  
Improving Lives Benefit on May 7th!**

**To purchase tickets, attend for free  
via livestream, or for information  
about our auction and sponsorship  
opportunities, please visit:**

**[mymsaa.org/benefit](https://mymsaa.org/benefit)**

**Special Thanks to the Following Sponsors  
of MSAA's Improving Lives Benefit:**

**PRESENTING SPONSOR:  
Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corporation**

**GOLD SPONSORS:  
Biogen  
Genentech  
Immunic Therapeutics**

## MSAA's 2026 Mission Honoree: Tyler Campbell

MSAA is proud to name Tyler Campbell as this year's Improving Lives Benefit Mission Honoree. His story has truly been an inspiration to the MS community.

Tyler was a junior at San Diego State University (SDSU), attending on a football scholarship, when he awoke one morning unable to feel his arms and legs. This day would be the start of an entirely new direction for Tyler, as he adjusted to and excelled at a new way of life.

Son of the Hall of Fame football legend Earl Campbell, Tyler followed his family's mantra of "A Campbell Never Quits." With the support of his family, he continued to play football until he graduated in 2009 from SDSU. Unfortunately, fatigue and the need to focus on each move would keep him from his dream of following in his father's footsteps into the NFL.

Something Tyler unexpectedly encountered when he was first diagnosed was the lack of research and data available for the Black MS community. He supports MSAA's work and the many programs to raise awareness and create platforms for this community.

Along with his father Earl and other high-profile athletes, Tyler is a dedicated Ambassador and Thought Leader with the Pro Player Foundation serving individuals affected by multiple sclerosis. Founded in 2003, this nonprofit works to address the needs of underserved communities. Pro Player Foundation partners with professional



athletes to build initiatives that meet community needs, raise awareness and funding, and create lasting impact.

Tyler shared, "Through my life's trials and tribulations, HOPE is something that I never lost sight of. It's free and costs nothing – the best part is we all have access to it. HOPE makes room for determination, determination leads to a positive attitude, and with a positive attitude there is no limit to your altitude as a human being. I cling to HOPE. That HOPE for a better tomorrow linked us at Pro Player Foundation to MSAA back in 2019 in Lubbock, Texas and my life has been blessed beyond measure because of it. All I have ever wanted to do is serve the MS community and MSAA has been that vessel allowing me to do just that. My heart is truly full and beyond thankful to be this year's Mission Honoree."

Over the years, Tyler has accomplished many notable achievements. A highly successful and sought-after inspirational

speaker, Tyler shares his story of overcoming challenges and discovering new opportunities with groups throughout the country. Tyler has written an Amazon best-selling biography about his own life with MS called *The Ball*

*Came Out: Life From The Other Side Of The Field* and hosts a radio show, Real Lyfe Reel Talk on 102.7 ESPN. He and his wife Shana have four children and they currently reside in Austin. ■

## MSAA's 2026 Corporate Honoree: icometrix

MSAA is very pleased to recognize icometrix as this year's Improving Lives Benefit Corporate Honoree. Guided by world-leading experts, icometrix provides AI-powered brain imaging solutions to help improve care in neurological conditions, including multiple sclerosis.

"AI," or "artificial intelligence," is the ability of a computer to "think" as a person would – and be able to analyze and evaluate complex data. Such systems are programmed to recognize patterns, solve problems, and support decision-making. For the MS community, this means that MRI imaging can be quickly and precisely analyzed, avoiding time delays and human error, while also keeping a detailed database of results, so changes can be tracked over time. Such findings are vital to the diagnosis, treatment, and ongoing care of an individual with MS.

In the years since its founding in 2011, icometrix has developed several AI innovations to meet the needs of the medical community caring for neurological conditions such as multiple sclerosis, Alzheimer's disease, stroke, traumatic brain injury, and epilepsy. In 2014,

the company introduced icobrain, its flagship solution that performs automated detection and measurement of lesions and brain structures. Building on this clinical success, icometrix launched icompanion in 2020, a patient-centered platform that empowers individuals with MS to track their symptoms and stay connected with their clinical care team.



"At icometrix, we don't see AI as a goal in itself, but as a powerful enabler of better care," says CEO Wim Van Hecke. "For

people with multiple sclerosis, it is crucial to detect subtle changes in complex follow-up brain MRI scans. Together with radiologists, the icobrain AI detects and quantifies what is clinically relevant. Our mission is to ensure that every individual living with neurological conditions benefits from timely, informed, and personalized care. Hence, we are very proud and privileged to collaborate with the MSAA."

We are greatly appreciative of the advances that icometrix has made and the contributions to improving the treatment and care of individuals with MS, as well as those diagnosed with other neurological conditions. MSAA is proud to recognize icometrix as this year's Improving Lives Benefit Corporate Honoree. ■

# When Courage and Strength Move Mountains

By Jessica Chittenden

August 8, 1988, was a memorable day. Not only was the 8-8-88 date of significance to anyone interested in numbers, but this day was also of significance to my family. This was the day my dad was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis.

At five years of age, I didn't know what this diagnosis meant, but as time passed, I could see how MS was affecting him. And over the years, I have always been so proud of my father's tremendous courage and strength.

At the time of his diagnosis, my dad, Patrick Kiernan, was an optician with his own shop. His initial symptoms included numbness in his right leg and inflammation of his eye (optic neuritis). He was also losing balance and stumbling. For almost 40 years, my dad has told me that his feet "feel like cement." I can just imagine how challenging this must have been for him while working as an optician.

Throughout the years, my dad has been limited in his ability to go places or walk long distances. Fortunately, he is still able to get



***Jessica Chittenden (right), and her brother, Joseph Kiernan (middle), ran in the 2026 Walt Disney World® Half Marathon presented by State Farm to raise funds for MSAA's programs and to honor their father, Patrick Kiernan (left).***

around with just a cane. However, he is often cold, and experiences severe fatigue as well as difficulties with sleeping. Undoubtedly, this fatigue and lack of sleep contribute to his struggles with attention and following a thought.

Yes, his thoughts jump all over the place, but we love him and hope we're keeping up on all of these "rides." Sometimes he'll jump

from one story to the next and we're like... "Wait a minute, when did we leave this ride and get on a different one?"

MS has affected my dad's life in more ways than I can describe, however, he never lets MS get him down. He has always believed that he can get through whatever challenges come his way... and his mindset has always been a source of amazement and encouragement for me.

I knew that I wanted to help raise money for people with MS, so I began researching MS fundraisers. I saw that MSAA offers options to participate in the *runDisney*® endurance events, and the fundraising helps support their free programs and services. This really caught my attention, since I am a Disney lover through and through – it even led me to being a part-time travel agent – and it just seemed like a perfect marriage!

So, in 2025, I decided to run my first-ever half marathon. I've never been a runner, but I figured, why not do it in Disney, since it is one of my favorite places!

I was initially going to just raise the money myself, but when I told my family about it, my big brother, Joseph Kiernan, decided to also participate in honor of our dad. My brother and I had the support of our entire family for running a half marathon. This includes my mom, Christine, who has been married to my dad for more than 50 years. In total, 12 of us traveled to Disney for this special event.

During my year of training, my dad was my inspiration. I kept telling myself, if he can have

feet that feel like cement for almost 40 years, I can get through this 13.2-mile half marathon. He has shown me so much about power, resilience, and what the mind can do.

This was seriously a magical, physically challenging, yet rewarding experience. Starting out with this race and then continuing on to an exciting Disney vacation for the rest of the week, was a dream come true! My dad was able to see me and my big brother through the finish line, take part in our family vacation, and then end the week with the "Happily Ever After" fireworks. My dad LOVES fireworks, so this was a perfect topping to our trip.

My dad came to the race and he proudly cried when my brother and I crossed the finish line. And honestly, that moment meant everything. Because the truth is, every mile of that race was really for him. His strength is the reason I even believed I could try something that once felt impossible. And if there's one thing my dad has taught me over the last 38 years, it's that even when your body feels like cement... your spirit can still move mountains. ■

***MSAA would like to express our sincere appreciation to all of the Team MSAA participants, as well as all those who cheer them on, for their fundraising efforts in support of our vital programs and services.***

# Become an MSAA Monthly Improver!

*MSAA Monthly Improvers are a generous group of donors making recurring, monthly gifts to improve the lives of people with MS.*

Recurring donations make it easy for you to support MSAA's free programs and services – while also providing MSAA with a reliable stream of revenue each month.

## Questions?

Contact Donor Relations at  
(800) 532-7667, ext. 172, or  
[DonorRelations@mymsaa.org](mailto:DonorRelations@mymsaa.org)



**SIGN UP TODAY!**

[mymsaa.org/monthly](https://mymsaa.org/monthly)



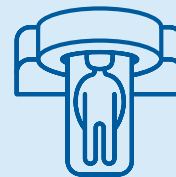
**\$10/month**

quad canes for three individuals with MS



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cooling vests for two individuals with MS



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supports funding for an MRI exam for an individual with MS

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## GET TEXT UPDATES **from MSAA**

**WHY SIGN UP?** You'll get important MS-related news, timely updates about our programs, and easy ways to support the MS community right from your phone.

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## Ways to Make a Big Impact



Through a planned gift, you can choose to see your gifts in action now, or leave gifts that will support our work as your legacy:

- **Gifts from your IRA**, also known as a Qualified Charitable Distribution
- Including MSAA in your **Will or Living Trust**
- Naming MSAA as a Beneficiary from a variety of policies
- Supporting through **Donor Advised Funds (DAF)**, **Appreciated Securities**, or a variety of other options

**Contact Us** to discuss how you can leave a legacy of support for the MS community:  
Scott Fremont, VP of Development  
(800) 532-7667, ext. 101  
[sfremont@mymsaa.org](mailto:sfremont@mymsaa.org)

Learn More at  
[mymsaa.org/planned-giving](https://mymsaa.org/planned-giving)



MSAA is very proud to present our 2026-2027

# ART SHOWCASE

Each year, MSAA features the work of artists with MS in the annual MSAA Art Showcase, highlighting one artist each month as our Artist of the Month.

We received many wonderful submissions from more than 90 artists across the country and are delighted to share their work and inspiring stories!



View the complete gallery at [mymsaa.org/artshowcase2026](https://mymsaa.org/artshowcase2026)