



# Keys To Adapting Your Environment

Presented by:  
Shaina Meyer OTR/L, MSCS

## **Kyle Pinion:**

Well, good evening and welcome to the Multiple Sclerosis Association of America's live webinar: Keys to Adapting Your Environment. I'm Kyle Pinion, Vice President of Mission Delivery for MSAA and your host for tonight's program. On behalf of MSAA and our presenter, we greatly appreciate the opportunity to keep you updated on this very important topic. And please know, as always, we hope you and your family are staying safe and healthy in these very uncertain times.

As you may know, MSAA is a national nonprofit organization in service for over 50 years, dedicated to improving lives today for the MS community. I wanted to take a moment to give a briefer than brief overview of our services. If you've ever called us before, you've likely already connected with trained and compassionate Helpline specialists who have a social services or counseling background and are familiar with MS. Helpline specialists can assist people living with MS and their care community with identifying helpful MSAA program recommendations, as well as other resources available from the broader MS support community.

I will also note the MSAA cooling and equipment programs that are available to individuals who might be experiencing financial or insurance barriers to accessing tangible items that can help to manage some of the symptoms of MS. Examples of products available through these programs include items such as cooling vests to help those experiencing heat sensitivity, and/or seated four-prong walkers for mobility support.

We also have the MSAA MRI Access program, which I'm sure some of you have heard of, for those who are experiencing financial barriers to accessing their cranial and/or C-spine MRI for a diagnosis of MS or to track disease activity. For information about eligibility criteria, applications, or just more details about these or other MSAA programs, please visit the MSAA website at [mymsaa.org](http://mymsaa.org). Pop us over an email or give us a call. We would love to hear from you.

Also, a brief reminder that the discussion being presented today is for reference and informational purposes only and does not constitute formal medical recommendations or any personalized recommendations. Please be sure to consult with your medical professional.

For your friends and loved ones who couldn't join us, today's program will be archived to our website very soon. For our Q&A session, please type your questions into the chat box and we'll address them at the end of the presentation. Also, if you are having any technical issues at all,

please type those concerns in the chat box as well, and myself and my helper, Marie, will hopefully get you to where you need to go and give you everything you need.

Finally, at the conclusion of tonight's program, you'll be asked to complete a short survey. We would be so grateful and appreciative if you complete the survey before closing out the meeting window. Your honest and open feedback of our programs is vitally important and helps shape future programs.

With that said, I am so delighted to introduce you to our presenter for tonight's presentation, Shaina Meyer, the Clinical Rehab Manager and Continuous Improvement Manager at the Lou Ruvo Center for Brain Health at Cleveland Clinic. Shaina received her bachelor's degree in psychology from Westminster College, master's degree in Occupational Therapy from St Louis University, and master's degree in Organizational Leadership from Colorado State University Global. She has dedicated time to continuous learning and earning certifications such as the Multiple Sclerosis Certified Specialist MSCS, which you might see behind many of our friends' names to improve care delivery for people living with neurodegenerative conditions. She's also a member of MSAA's Healthcare Advisory Council. Tonight, Shaina will discuss how the profession of occupational therapy can support those living with MS to adapt throughout the various stages of life and present a fresh take on practical solutions for environmental adaptations to promote accessibility and better quality of life outcomes. With that said, Shaina, I'm going to turn it over to you. Thank you so much and we're looking forward to your presentation.

### **Shaina Meyer:**

Thank you so much for that warm introduction, Kyle. I'm so excited to be here tonight to speak to you all about something I'm very passionate about. So, thank you for that welcome. My name is Shaina. I look forward to answering any questions you all have at the end. I just wanted to review a few objectives that I hope you all take away from this evening. So, I hope that by the end you'll be able to describe what occupational therapy means, especially to those supporting those that live with MS and understand how different adaptations and modifications can support your independence and safety. And to be able to identify a few ways, hopefully, that you can adapt or modify your environment for improved outcomes for yourself after leaving this webinar.

So before we get started, this evening, I need you all to take just a second while I'm talking to grab a scrap piece of paper, a pen or a pencil or something to write with, if you have shoes or socks near you or on already, that would be great, and then some kind of something to pinch, like a clip, a hair clip, a clothespin, a chip clip or a binder clip, just anything that you can squeeze. So, I'll be giving you some activities as we talk this evening.

So the first thing I'm going to talk about as we are going through as you're grabbing your items is what occupational therapy is. Some of you may have had O.T. before, which is what I'm going to refer to it the rest of this presentation. And some of you may be new to the idea of O.T. Occupational therapists help people of all ages, but tonight we're focusing mostly on people living with MS, so mostly adults. And we help people be as independent as possible with the things that you need to do, which we call activities of daily living. Those are things like getting dressed or bathing or feeding yourself or going to the bathroom.

We also help people with the things that they want to do and to improve quality of life. And we call those IADLs, or instrumental activities of daily living. Those kinds of things would be maybe you have a job, and you need to go to work, so that's something that you want to do so you can have an income for your family. Or maybe you're a caregiver for a child or for your parents or

your pets. Or maybe you have hobbies or interests like knitting or sewing or painting or photography. Or maybe you want to be able to exercise so you can maintain your healthy, active lifestyle with MS. So, it's what are those roles that you fulfill and what are those things that you need and want to do? And that is the core of occupational therapy.

All right. So, the next slide, I just want to go over the basics of what an O.T. evaluation looks like, more for your reference or if you ever have O.T. so you know what to expect, and then we'll get into the meat of tonight's presentation. So, the occupational profile is what we start with, and that's the who, what, when, why, and where. We want to know what you are seeking from O.T., what concerns you have about your performance with activities of daily living? Where do you feel successful? What barriers are you experiencing? What your occupational history is and how that has evolved or changed over time? What you value and what your interests are and what your priorities and your desired outcomes are? So, it's quite complex. A lot of questions, a lot of getting to know you, a lot of figuring out where we need to help.

And then performance analysis is then when we look at different assessments or tools or we analyze how you're doing a specific activity of daily living so that we can get a good idea of what the problem is. If it's weakness or spasticity or flexibility issue or cognitive or really kind of everything with MS, there can be a variety of symptoms that impact your activities of daily living.

And then the wrap up of the evaluation typically consists of putting that all together and interpreting the data that we found and then creating goals that are meaningful to you and helping you get to your desired outcomes. And then we kind of figure out what the frequency and the duration should be and how we will know that we are meeting your goals or making an impact for you.

And then we get into treatment, and treatment is highly variable. It really depends on your goals, and it really depends on the setting that you're in, whether that be in your home, doing home health, or in a facility, like inpatient rehabilitation or a hospital, or whether that be outpatient therapy. And there are many other forms, or places you can get treatment. So, it really depends. But essentially what you would see in an O.T. treatment would be doing different types of occupations in different ways, doing activities that would support your occupations, training on how to do something differently, adapting or modifying how you are doing something, advocating for your needs, which is where places like MSAA come in handy, and education, education, education. It is so vital that we are providing education to you on why we're doing something and what that means for you and also overcoming any barriers to your progress.

And then I just put together a slide here just to kind of show you all the different ways that MS can impact your activities of daily living and your function. So, it can impact how you do your basic activities of daily living because there are so many symptoms with MS, like the numbness, tingling, balance and walking difficulty, vision problems like optic neuritis or double vision or diplopia or nystagmus, or dizziness, or fatigue, or weakness, or cognitive changes, or pain, muscle spasms, tremor, bladder, pelvis function or depression, anxiety, and there are certainly other symptoms. So, if you think about the symptoms that you're experiencing that I just named off, most of those can definitely impact the things you're seeing on the slide right now. How you participate in meaningful activities, how you use your hands to prepare food or write, how you provide care for other people. So, there's so many different ways that can impact our function.

So self-efficacy is then where we can come into play. So, one of the articles I really enjoy says in people living with MS, increased self-efficacy, with self-efficacy meaning how someone's confidence... somebody's confidence in their own ability to manage situations with the skills he

or she possesses. It is related to enhanced quality of life, their own perceived health status, positive adjustments to MS or other diseases, and increased motivation and engagement and meaningful activities. So self-efficacy really is the foundation of motivation and action that help lead us to behavioral changes. And people with higher self-efficacy are more likely to set challenging personal goals, persist in achieving them, and feel more capable of reaching them. So, I wanted to throw that slide in here this evening, because for those of you attending, I hope that you're attending because you're wanting to build yourself self-efficacy, you're wanting to build your knowledge base of learning different ways that you can support your independence.

So now here's the fresh take that I threw into my synopsis. So, what I want to start with, we're going to get into the meat of tonight now that hopefully you have a decent understanding of occupational therapy. I'm going to be using some different examples from the animal kingdom to show you how animals adapt and modify their surroundings and their environment so that we can understand all the various ways that we can do the same thing, but obviously from a human perspective.

So, the first thing that I wanted to talk about, we have a model in occupational therapy called the PEO model. It is the person, the environment, and the occupation. And this model helps to guide us when we're putting together a plan to help somebody. So, person is what I'm going to start with. And the person refers to an individual with a unique set of identities, experiences, and abilities. So, when we look at helping somebody adapt to changes they're experiencing from MS, we look at the person and what the person is going through. So here are a couple of animals that have adapted their person to be more apt to survive and to be more independent and thrive.

So, tardigrades, which are these water bears, some of you might think they're cute, some of you might think that's hideous. But they are the toughest animal on earth, and they can survive in spectacularly extreme environments and conditions. Animal Planet actually aired a countdown story about them being the most rugged creatures on Earth because they can survive in space, volcanoes, Arctic ice, and the deepest points in the ocean. And they survive by adapting their body structure. It's really interesting to read more about these tardigrades.

And then another one is an okapi, I think that's how we say it, and they're forest giraffes. And they are these solitary animals that live in the rainforests of Congo, which is a very dense, very dark, very hot environment with lots of predators. So, they've adapted and survived by communication techniques and by their hygiene. So, they have this chemical that they submit through their hooves so that they can communicate to each other. And they've also developed stripes on their bodies, kind of like a zebra, and that helps them to blend into their surroundings when they're in these dense tropical areas so that they can reduce the risk of a predator seeing them. So, there is a couple personal adaptational animals for consideration.

And then I want to talk about environment. So sometimes we need to adapt our environment. And our environment is the physical, the social, the cultural, and the socioeconomic factors that make up your life. It's kind of everything around you. And so, here's a couple of animals for consideration that have adapted their environments. So, beavers build dams out of trees, grass, rocks, and mud. And actually, the reason that they do that is so that they have a safe pond where they can build their beaver lodge and be safe. And that's why they build dams. They're adapting their environment so that they can survive and build their families. And then the African bullfrogs, they bury themselves six to eight inches underground and create a mucous membrane that hardens into a cocoon, and they can survive up to seven years while waiting for

rain. So, they change their environment so that they can survive when they don't really have water for seven years.

And then the last page here we're going to look at is occupational. So, occupations refer to those functional tasks and activities that you engage in, as I was explaining a little bit earlier. So here are a couple of animals that have adapted how they do their occupations. So, sloths are energy saving mammals, and they take life at a slow pace to avoid the rush and tumble for food. And subscribing to these movement patterns helps them avoid being identified as prey. So, they've really adapted so that they are not identified by prey.

Interesting little fact, though, about these sloths: they also have a very particular poop routine. So, I am an OT, so sometimes that comes up, I hope you're not too uncomfortable by that word, but that is something that we help people with. And I thought that this was so interesting that sloths do this, they only once a week can go to the bathroom and so they can lose up to one third of their body weight when they choose to go to the bathroom. And they really put themselves at risk because they have to climb all the way, very slowly, down these trees just to get to the canopy at the base of the tree and go to the bathroom. And they do this little dance at the base of the tree to help themselves go. So, they've really adapted their bowel and bladder routine so that they can go to the bathroom. It is a little unsafe for them, so scientists are still trying to figure out exactly why they have this very specific routine for bowel and bladder.

And then these capuchin monkeys, they have made their own stone tools to help them break into nuts so that they can eat. So, they've adapted their occupations over 3000 years, actually, and their tools have changed depending on the type of nuts that are available at that time in our history.

So now that you know a little bit more about animals and how we can adapt our person and our environment and our occupations, I'm just going to kind of start generalizing a lot of tips and tools that maybe you can take away in adapting your own lives. And I really liked this quote from Confucius that "the ability to success is often the ability to adapt". So, we want to be adaptable. Adaptable is good, and it is important for us to continue to try to do things and improve how we do them. But it is also important to know when it is time to change how we do something to be more successful and safe. So, we're going to look at some situations of our own now.

So, the first task I'm going to have you all do is grab a seat in your favorite chair if you're not already, but if you're comfortable at your desk, you can stay there. I'm going to just ask you some questions to ponder here for a second. So where do you feel your sit bones? Our sit bones are at the bottom of our bottom? That's where we're sitting. It's where all the pressure is. Do you feel them? And how does that change when you lean forward and when you lean back and when you cross your legs and uncross them? Where are your knees in proportion to your hips? Are they lower than your hips? Are they higher than your hips or are your hips and your knees pretty even and you could lay a book on your lap, and it wouldn't fall off? Can you get your feet flat on the floor? Are your feet flat on the floor right now, or are they dangling? Can you sit upright or are you slouched? So how are you kind of feeling, where's your pelvis, is it kind of making... is your back making a "C" shape right now or are you pretty erect? And can you get up without using the arms? And that's another question I want you to consider. The reason I'm asking all of this is because if you have a hard time getting up or if you have a hard time moving around, there are a lot of adaptations that can help you. And it's really important to be thinking about all these different things as you do activities because they can make it easier or more difficult, depending.

So here are getting into some tips and some tools. So, these are some basic transfer tips and tools to think about in relation to those questions I just asked. If you do need help getting up, a gait belt can make it a lot safer for someone to assist you. It gives a really good grabbing point. It is not recommended to grab under the arms or by the arms and pull somebody.

Another thing to consider is "nose over toes". When you're getting up from a low surface, you want to be able to lean forward and shift your weight forward and feel those sit bones kind of come off the chair a little bit, because if you're all the way back in the chair, that's a long way to go and that's not a good shift of your weight or your center of gravity. So, "nose over toes" is a really good strategy to help kind of move yourself to get up.

There are some stand assist bars if you have a couch or a chair or something that's just not very supportive. They make these stand assist bars that you can search for online, and you can use those to help yourself push up. They have shower chairs with and without arms. They have tub transfer benches that are wider for your shower. They have toilet safety frames and raised toilet seats, and those can make it easier to get on and off the toilet. They have bed rails to help you when you're getting in or out of bed and grab bars, and those can be installed or they can be suction cup grab bars, depending on the type of shower you have.

Then next section of this is just some different functional mobility tips and tools. So, I put a lot of ideas up here, but there are so many different pieces of adaptive equipment and durable medical equipment out there. So, if you look at the top here, there are canes and regular walkers and rollators on four wheels and luxury rollators that are a bit more steady and wide. There are lightweight transport wheelchairs where you can use it as a walker, or you can sit on it. So, there's many different types of mobility devices out there, and there are way more than this. And then you can get into power mobility as well, like a travel portable power wheelchair or a scooter or a standard power wheelchair or a custom power wheelchair. With all of these options, it is really important that if you are having changes in your functional mobility, that you do get an assessment by a physical and an occupational therapist because it can be really difficult to decide what is best for you. And you don't want something that is too supportive because you can lose strength if you're not using it appropriately. But you also want something that is just the right amount of support so that you have more mobility, you feel like you can be safe and move around more, because if you don't feel safe, then what do we do? We just sit, sit down and we don't get up as much and then we can actually lose more balance and lose more strength.

And then the last part of all of the functional mobility section would be all of these other home and community modifications. And there are so many out there. So, if you are having trouble getting up from a chair or moving around in your home, or maybe just starting to have some trouble getting around in the community, you want to know what your options are and you want to make sure you have the right equipment and the right exercises so that you can stay independent and functional. But here are some other ideas of things that are out there. There are hospital beds, there are shower seats, there are stand assist lifts, there are Hoyer lifts that can lift you up in a sling. There are also these stand-up lifts, and they can stand you up with the sling behind you. There are this slide-and-ride, a slide-and-ride is a transfer board between the car seat and whatever wheelchair or device you're using. There are vehicle lifts, stair lifts, so you can get upstairs and there are overhead track lifts. So, there are so many different things that you can adapt your home to make it safer for you depending on your needs.

OK, activity number two. So, this one, we're going to take a look at dressing. So, if you are wearing socks or shoes, go ahead and try taking them off. If you are not wearing socks and shoes, go ahead and try putting them on. So, I want you to think about a few questions as you're doing this. Can you do it? So, can you do it on your own or do you need some help from somebody else? Where do you do this? So aside from wherever you're listening in right now, where would you typically do this? Would you do this on your toilet, in the bathroom? Would you do this by the front door or back door on a chair? Would you do this in your bedroom, or would you do this standing and be leaning against a wall? So where are you putting your shoes and socks on and how does that feel? And how do you do it? What technique do you use? Do you reach over and go all the way to the floor and get short of breath? Or do you sit down and bring your leg up to you? Do you feel pain, stiffness, or do you get short of breath when you're doing this? And is it safe? If you saw somebody else doing the same thing, would you agree that that is a safe activity for them to be doing like that?

So, I ask all of these questions because sometimes when we're doing just very basic activities of daily living, we might be doing it in a way that there could be a way to be easier for ourselves. There might be a way to reduce some fatigue or some strain. There might be a different technique that gives our body a different kind of challenge in a different way. So, there's so many different ways to get dressed or to brush our teeth or to take a shower or to eat. And that's one thing to really think about.

So, with that, more tips and tools for you to consider. So here are some very basic modifications and adaptations for getting dressed and for activities of daily living. So, there are built up grips, sometimes if our hands get tired or they feel weak or we have changes in sensation like numbness or tingling, it can be difficult to pinch small items or hold on to them or grasp them. And so, they make built up handles. So, these gray ones on the bottom left are universal holders. And so, they can... you can put different sized objects inside of them and the ones on the top right corner, the rainbow ones, those are built up foam tubing so that you can modify pretty much anything with that built up foam.

And then there are some other tools, like a button hook, for example, that you see here, and a sock aid, to put a sock on from whatever position you're in and a zipper pull. And there's even websites out there like Zappos Adaptive, and there's a lot of clothing lines coming out as well that make adaptive clothing that is already adaptable, and you don't have to modify it or do it in a different way.

And then the next slide are just some other activities of daily living and instrumental activities of daily living modifications that you might see and there are so many out there. So, I tried to put a good variety on this slide, but know that if you are having trouble modifying something, you can always ask for an occupational therapy referral or even ask around in your support groups or your network because a lot of people have adapted or tried different things and might be able to give you some recommendations. So, in this slide, you can see that there's an adaptive cutting board for somebody who's just using one hand, so it has different parts on it that can stabilize fruits or vegetables so you can cut with one hand. There is a fingernail clipper here that doesn't flip over or turn, so that way you can just stabilize it on the table.

There is a bunch of gadgets here in this top third from the left picture, these are all cooking gadgets, just to demonstrate that there's a lot of different ways to modify cooking, like Dycem, and I will get to that word here in a second. So, one of my favorite types of material as an OT. There's a juice pourer, or a pitcher pourer, so that if you cannot stabilize or hold on to a pitcher to pour it, you can put it on this rack, and it will help tip it for you. There are extended handles,

handles positioned differently. You can modify your oven or your stove where there can be a mirror over top so that you can see what's happening inside of the pot or the pan. If you're in a wheelchair, you can roll up to a table and sit to do your chopping for your fruits and vegetables. There are also lots of modern date gadgets that just make life a bit easier. On here you can also see if you are having maybe some forgetfulness or cognitive changes that there are ways to adapt for that as well, like color coding things or organizing things so that it's easier to find what you need when you need it.

The bottom left here is a lot of different dressing adaptive equipment, like a reacher, a stockade, a shoehorn, a dressing stick. So, there's so many different things out there, elastic shoelaces. And then the next picture is a modified way of, I might butcher this, I don't crochet or knit, I think that they might be knitting there, they're either knitting or crocheting, and it's a modified way to hold the needle. This one with the thumb is one of my particular favorites because I love to read. Kyle and I were talking about that before the webinar today. This particular device, you slip onto your thumb, and it helps to hold your pages open when you're reading. And then, as another reminder here, too, technology can also be a great adaptation or modification. There's so many different apps that can remind us to do things. There are apps that can give us advice or time for us so that we don't spend too much time doing an activity and we pay attention that maybe it's been 25 minutes and maybe we need to take a rest. There are so many great apps out there to use now.

Oh, one more thing that I didn't put on this page too, that I am a particular fan of for MS can be the Squatty Potty. So sometimes going to the bathroom can be an issue for people so sometimes you need to change your position while you're having your bowel or bladder routines. And that can be the difference between making it easier to go to the bathroom.

All right. Last activity for you all today. Take out that pen or pencil and paper and then the clip that you grabbed. And I just want you to write a short sentence or write your name or anything just on the paper. And then I want you to kind of put the clip in your hand and pinch it and move it around within your hand. And I want you to think about these questions as you're doing that. Can you read the sentence? Does your writing change, do you notice that your writing has changed? Does it change as you're writing? Is it difficult to hold on to or to manipulate either item? And does your hand feel different than it used to when you're doing this? And did you drop or almost drop the items? So, these are some questions to think about as you're doing this fine motor task today.

So here are some tips, tools, and modifications to consider here. So, one of my favorite materials that I was mentioning earlier is Dycem. It is D-Y-C-E-M, not to be confused with Dyson vacuum cleaner or hair dryer. This material is really wonderful. It's very, very tacky and it's very, very grippy. So, if you have hand function changes, whether that be loss of sensation or tingling or weakness this really helps improve your grip so that you can really hold on to and get a really good grip on what you're trying to open or stabilize or hold on to. It actually also can reduce the risk of fatigue because it is so grippy that you don't have to grab so hard. It's a lot easier to hold on to something.

There are also lots of other tools and adaptations and modifications here, like this pen, this pen that you see here is called Penagain, it's just a nice little wishbone-looking or spaceship pen and it fits right on to your finger in a groove like manner. And so, it's really kind of hugs your finger, and so it doesn't... you don't have to hold it with such a precision grip as much so it makes writing a little bit easier for some people. There's also, you see here, a rocker knife. A rocker knife is a different technique of cutting where you don't need to stabilize with a fork.



When you stabilize with a fork, when you're cutting, it's because you're doing a slicing motion back and forth which moves food across your plate. If you're pushing down and rocking, you don't have to stabilize because the food is being pushed down into your plate, not across. And then this that you see here is a hand weight. Sometimes we in OT will modify the external hand so that it can work a little bit better. So, people with tremors or people who don't feel they have good stability they might benefit from a weighted glove or a tighter glove or something to help improve the kinesthetic or the touch to their hand.

And then some other things that I wanted to add in here today are some other generalized abilities that can be impacted, especially with summer right around the corner. Cooling your environment is also really important for some people and how you do, how you adapt and modify during the summer months because things that might not be troublesome for you in the colder months might become more difficult once that heat comes out. I live in Las Vegas, so that's particularly something that can really impact people that I'm trying to help. So, the pillows and the sheets that you're sleeping on can be... can have an impact on not only your sleep and then how you feel the next day, but also your body temperature and your heat. Bamboo, cotton, and moisture-wicking type sheets are typically more recommended to help keep your environment cool while you sleep. Try to avoid those synthetic materials.

You can also get cooling gel pillows or cooling gel mattress toppers. There's different things out there like that. Also, make sure that your air conditioning unit is tuned up and change your filters or have someone help you with that. Then there are lots of air coolers, fans and misters and sunshades and awnings. Also making sure that your windows have good weather stripping and insulation to keep the heat out. And then there are so many cooling devices out there now. So, there are hats that you can wear that have UPF protection to reduce the amount of rays that make it through to your head. They also make little cooling things you can put inside of your hat.

There are bracelets and jewelry you can wear that are cooling. There are scarves and vests and core temperature huggers. There are bra inserts. There are neckties or neck towels that you can wet and snap and they get cool. There are water bottles that can check your hydration intake. So, there are so many things out there that can be helpful. And the MSAA does have the Cooling Distribution Program that can help you as well.

And then we move into, just... I want to now... we're getting close to the end of my presentation. So, I want to start to kind of summarize some things and wrap things up into some general considerations for adapting to your environment. So here are some accessibility basics. Rearrange your space. If your space or your environment isn't really working for you and you find yourself maybe bumping into that coffee table or walking all the way around when it could be a shorter path, rearrange or have someone help you rearrange your space and put more frequently used items within easy reach.

Reduce clutter. It is important to try to take some time every now and then just to kind of go through our things and see if maybe there's some stuff that we could say goodbye to. It makes it easier to find things when we need them. So, it can especially help if it's hard to find things, if you are misplacing items. And then also it's important items should have a home. We should know where that item is, and we should know that it's easily accessible to ourselves and we don't have to go out of our way to get it. One of my favorite ones I like to say is the water bottle. So, make sure you have your water bottle within easy reach. It's better to stay hydrated.

Use time saving equipment. So, there's a lot of equipment out there that can help reduce your effort or reduce your time. So that way your effort and your time are spent better elsewhere

where you really want it. So, I tell people first think about the very basic things that you have to do. You have to go to the bathroom. We have to clean ourselves. We have to get dressed, especially if we're going out in public. We have to eat and hydrate our bodies. So, think about those activities that we have to do and try to think about easier ways to do them because we have to do them. There are so many things we want to do, and if we spend all of our energy just trying to do our basic activities, it can really impact our ability to do the things we want.

Make space work for you. So, consider the height of your bed, consider the height of your chair or your couch, or if it's too soft and it's hard to get out of, or if you start to have a lot of pain or discomfort, consider the layout of your furniture and how you have to navigate around it.

Make your space more relaxing. So, relaxation and stress reduction are very important in MS. So, I do consider that to be part of adapting our environment we want to feel happy, or at least somewhat happy when we're in our spaces. So maybe I add a bit of color that makes you happy or some flowers or invest in your sleep so that you feel more comfortable while you're trying to sleep. Or maybe if you love something, make sure it's accessible. If you love to read, make sure you have a book that's accessible to you so that you're more likely to pick up the book instead of turn on the television.

And then finally, start now. So, we all get busy and we all have a lot going on, especially when you're living with MS. So, reflect on what you would like your home and your life to look like, where starts... and then start small. Just begin taking small steps to create a more calm and relaxing home that you enjoy being in. It can be the tiniest little things, you know, do something nice and small for yourself every day because it will build up.

All right. And then the last part here is some other considerations I just wanted to add here. So, practice meaningful skills. Any OT will tell you, you know, if you want to get better at something or you want to maintain something, you need to practice it. Make sure you're doing it the right way. Make sure you're doing it in a safe way. Make sure you have the right equipment, but practice it. The more we practice or work on something, the more likely we are going to be to be successful with that.

Reduce simultaneous tasks. Sometimes if you're doing more than one thing, that activity is going to be very difficult. Our minds and our bodies don't always like to be tasked with too many things at one time. Some people like to say that they are multitasking experts, but that's not necessarily good. And we're more likely to make a mistake and we're more likely to use unnecessary energy. So, try to reduce as many simultaneous tasks as possible.

Allow yourself adequate time and then some. There's nothing more impactful on our energy and how we do activities than if we rush through it. So, take some time, take some deep breaths, space things out, do small bits of something to get to the larger bit of it and make sure that you have plenty of time.

Change the size and shapes of the objects that you're working with, especially if you have hand dysfunction. Try to consider what objects you're putting in your hands during the day and which objects are difficult, and then think, "is there a different way I could build this up a little bit more? Maybe I need it to be more supportive. Maybe I need it to be a little heavier. Maybe I need it to be a little bit lighter." And just try to kind of figure out what works for you.

And then the final one is: change your body position. If something isn't working, maybe you need to change your body position. One of my favorite examples for that one is people who will

tell me sometimes that they're having trouble getting food to their mouth without spilling much. I ask them where they're sitting to eat, and some people are sitting in a chair or a recliner and eating from a tray table or even something on their lap. That's not adequate or best body position to be eating. So then if that person were having trouble, I might tell them that we need to find a way for them to be sitting up taller and closer to their food so that they're not slouched and trying to reach far to get it. They might also need arms support so that their arms aren't out in the open trying to move that far. So, body position can really change how you complete a task.

OK, the last couple of slides here that, or the last slide, I guess, I have is just a couple frequently asked questions that I get about tips and tools for adapting the environment. Does insurance cover adaptive equipment and durable medical equipment? Just as a recap, adaptive equipment, those are smaller things, things like a button hook or a pen modification or a hand weight or a rocker knife. Just those smaller bits of equipment. And then durable medical equipment are the more long term use items that you might obtain, like a walker or a wheelchair or a scooter, those kinds of things. So, the answer to this question is pretty complicated, but it's most insurances do not cover adaptive equipment and even some durable medical equipment. Most will to some degree cover durable medical equipment, but like walkers and wheelchairs and scooters. But that's if you meet their criteria. So, most insurances have specific criteria that you have to meet in order to qualify for that.

Where can I purchase adaptive equipment and durable medical equipment? So, I would just say that that really depends on where you live. And, you know, if you're rural or if you're urban or what state you live in, some people will just order things online from a vendor like Amazon or somewhere else. Some people, if it's a durable medical equipment, like a wheelchair, you need to go through a vendor so that you can make sure you're getting the right piece of equipment and that it fits you and your needs. Some people will borrow things from family or friends, and then you can also get some adaptive equipment and durable medical equipment through programs for people living with MS, like the MSAA equipment distribution programs. So, there are some different options out there, but get crafty and do your research and ask for help when you need it.

And when do I consider skilled therapy? So today is just a generalizability kind of presentation, giving you some things to think about and some food for thought. When you don't really know what else to do is a good time to get skilled therapy. Another time to get skilled therapy is if you haven't had it yet. Living with MS can present many different challenges, and I like to tell people that it's always better to go early because if you wait until something has really become a problem and you can't do that activity anymore, it's a lot more difficult for us to help you. If you come to us when something is starting to change and you're noticing something's getting more difficult or more frustrating or more lengthy, then we can help you to adapt, to modify and potentially even do exercises to restore some of your function so that you don't maybe have that problem and you can maintain your independence with that.

So that leads me to my last slide, which is the time for questions. And Kyle will be answering those or giving me those.

**Kyle Pinion:**

Yes, I cannot possibly answer them, but I will happily gather them for you. That was wonderful, Shaina, thank you so much. I learned so much, and I also, I am just such a sucker for interactive presentations, and I hope, I wrote my sentence down, I hope you guys all did too and got the chance to practice some of her exercises. So fascinating.

So, I'm going to gather up some questions. Certainly, if you have a question feel free to drop it into the Q&A box. We're very live here and interactive, so I definitely want to make sure that I get your questions. And we've only got about 10 minutes in order to do it. And I've got a bunch already that came in through our registration process.

So, Shaina, I'm going to start maybe with... I think this is an interesting challenge. Someone asked about their multi-level home, which I think is probably a significant issue for someone either dealing with spasticity, mobility concerns or even just fatigue. I say "just", fatigue is also a major issue in MS. But, if someone has a multi-level home, say like there's a basement laundry or the bedroom or the shower on the second floor, what are some suggested adaptations or modifications that could be made to help make life a little easier for them?

**Shaina Meyer:**

That's a wonderful question. I love these challenging questions. Multi-level homes are very difficult, but they're everywhere. You know, multi-level homes are very common, and we all want to try to age in place or to be able to stay in our home. So, what I would tell somebody that came to me with that problem would be to first start with physical therapy and address the issue of the stairs and make sure that you are doing it the right way for your mobility and your strength needs and your balance needs. We can do a full assessment and really figure out what you need to be working on and strengthening. But also, then to be able to teach you the best way to use your body to safely go up and safely go down stairs.

And if you are completely unable to do stairs and maybe you sit in a wheelchair most of the day, there are stair lifts, and they are expensive, so I tell people if that's something you're interested in looking into, you can ask your doctor or your provider or your therapist if you're working with one to see if they can put you in touch with a vendor. Or you can do some research on your own and find a vendor that does stair lifts appropriately. Some stair lift companies will have used models that aren't as expensive, but I also tell people to consider, that I understand that cost is sometimes a big issue, but there are MS resources. You can reach out to try to help you. And there are also... it's just kind of thinking about and planning for that long term need, if that is a problem, you know that you will have and you want to stay in your home, it sometimes is worth that financial investment instead of having to make another choice of selling, or moving, or moving into someone else's home.

**Kyle Pinion:**

I just wanted to share a suggestion which makes these programs so fun because we are a community, and we assist one another. And sometimes someone has a great idea that they think is helpful and it turns out to be just that. But so, Tamara, or TaMAra, you know, I am from the South, so it could be TaMAra, she said another pen that my OT suggests is made by Doctor Grip. It's called Center of Gravity; it is weighted at the tip and is a thicker pen with a rubber grip where you hold it. I have several of them. So, if you're in the market for a pen, Doctor Grip might be something for you. Just check that out.

**Shaina Meyer:**

That is a great one.

**Kyle Pinion:**

Yeah. I wonder if you'd heard of it, Shaina.

**Shaina Meyer:**

Yes. Yeah, that's another great pen with an excellent grip.

**Kyle Pinion:**

Excellent. Excellent. OK.

**Shaina Meyer:**

Which is probably why it's called Doctor Grip.

**Kyle Pinion:**

Yes, that makes sense. So, you hit on something interesting in your last answer about the cost of lifts and home modifications. I was going to ask about durable medical equipment resources, which you kind of touched upon, and we also have our DME program, of course, at MSAA that anyone can apply to. But, you know, home modifications and auto modifications are kind of interesting because they're very expensive. And I'm curious if there's any resources you typically refer your patients out to in order to be able to get the benefit of those alterations to their environment.

**Shaina Meyer:**

We mostly... we have amazing vendors in Las Vegas that we work with, and they have payment plans and they also sometimes will recommend the Care... is it Care Credit Card, the Care Credits [CareCredit] is another option for people who are looking to make these expensive changes that maybe don't have all the money upfront. That's another recommendation they'll make. Some people if you have a long-term disability insurance plan like you purchased before you were diagnosed with MS, a long term care plan, sometimes those will cover these home modifications. If you are a veteran and you have veteran benefits, sometimes they will cover these modifications as well to your home. But we mainly, we work with another occupational therapist in town, and she works with a contractor so they can go into the home, you can tell them what you're thinking about doing or where you're having issues, and then they give their recommendations because we can't go into people's homes.

And then there are some vendors in town as well we work with and we ask for their expertise, but financially I'd say asking vendors if they have a financial assistance program looking into your MS Resources and then maybe considering Care Credits [CareCredit] or something. Do you have any other recommendations, Kyle?

**Kyle Pinion:**

No, not necessarily, but if you want to reach out to our client services helpline, our team of social workers, who I mentioned at the beginning of this program, they have a lot, a real big list of resources and they may be able to point you in the right direction, especially in your local community. There are national programs that assist with people being able to obtain accessible vehicles, for example, that have been donated or have been modified. There are also local programs, sometimes counties even make things more available for people at their local center for independent living. So, these are different things that I would highly recommend. But get in touch with our helpline, and we will happily point you in the right direction where resources are available.

So, you mentioned... this question had a bit of a longer bit to it where they asked about tips for using silverware and writing, which I think you've touched on already. But they also asked about shampooing hair, which I think is kind of an interesting thing, and it's a little bit distinct from

bathing yourself overall because your movement's a little different and you're talking about slightly different material.

So, what sort of tips do you have for folks to better be able to take care of their fine coif?

**Shaina Meyer:**

That's an excellent question. I'm glad that someone asks that. Shampooing the hair can be very difficult. If you're able to get in the shower and you're just having difficulty with the actual act of shampooing, you need to consider are you having trouble opening or using the shampoo? Are you having trouble squeezing it? Are you having trouble with the lid? If so, maybe you need to invest in or get from someone else a pump and then take your favorite shampoo or conditioner and put it into the pump. That way you can pump your shampoo or conditioner onto your palm. For the actual act of shampooing, I really recommend, and actually, for just anybody who's not having trouble, it's one of my favorite little gadgets in the shower, is this silicone shampoo brush. They're just little round things, they have silicone knobs on the end. And so, when you're putting the shampoo in your hair, you just slip it on your hand and it gives you a really excellent scalp massage. It feels really nice, and it really gets into your roots better so that you don't have to use your fingers so aggressively.

A handheld shower hose also highly recommended, too. It makes it easier to really move that around. Those are pretty easy for most people to install. If you have someone that can help you, you just purchase one, you can get them on Amazon for pretty cheap and they just disconnect the nozzle from your showerhead and put the new handheld shower hose on. If it's actually getting in the shower that's the difficult part, they do make dry shampoos that are pretty good nowadays, and they also make shampoo caps where you can put like almost like a shower cap on your head and it has some kind of residue inside that can help you get the oils and dirt out of your hair.

**Kyle Pinion:**

Shaina, can you repeat that one more time for Tom? He wanted to see what that shampoo item that you put on your hair was called.

**Shaina Meyer:**

I'm going to actually, if I can field another question. In the meantime, I'm going to pull up an example and I'll show it that way as well.

**Kyle Pinion:**

Since we're on the subject of bathrooms, I think staying safe in the shower, that's a very vulnerable place, and I think it would be great if you could provide any key tips you have for patients you see regarding staying safe in the shower, especially if standing is a problem.

**Shaina Meyer:**

Yeah, shower safety is huge. I mean, the shower can get very slippery, and also just considering that with MS, shower time can for some people be one of the most exhausting, fatiguing activities that we do in our day. So having a shower seat or a shower chair, even if you don't need to sit for the entirety, can actually be really helpful. That way you can sit for maybe just when you are shampooing or washing your hair, so you save a little bit of energy. Another thing I like to tell people is, if you are feeling a little unsecure, unsteady, make sure you have grab bars in your shower or your tub area. They can be professionally installed, which is ideal, but if you don't have someone to do that, or you don't have the financial means, they do make

suction cup grab bars. You just have to make sure that they can really fully suction on and that they're not crossing grout lines or on a material that they can't stick well to. You also don't ever want to put full weight into suction cup grab bars because they're good for stability, but not to pull up on.

There are also, a handheld shower hose is highly recommended, non-slip stickies or a mat on the bottom so that your feet can really get good traction and not slip. And then outside of the shower, if you're getting very tired by that time and your muscles are maybe feeling a bit weak, investing and getting a terrycloth or towel style robe that you can just put on and sit and rest for a minute instead of having to then go through more motions and dry off, you can just put this robe on and sit and relax for a little bit. You can also get handrails that go over your toilet or on your toilet to make the toilet higher. If you want to get dressed on your toilet, you can get up a bidet to make it easier to wipe. Especially during the pandemic, the days became very popular when toilet paper was hard to come by. So, you can get bidets on Amazon if you have someone who can connect it to your water line on your toilet, which isn't too difficult depending on your setup that you have.

**Kyle Pinion:**

Um... Oh, sorry, Shaina, go ahead...

**Shaina Meyer:**

I was going to say, is there anything I'm missing there? We got the showers, non-slip...

**Kyle Pinion:**

I think you covered it all. I think, especially the shower itself. But I think you're in good shape. OK, Tom also asked a really good question. He said on one foot, I can't get my leg up on my knee to tie my shoe. Do you have any ideas that could assist?

**Shaina Meyer:**

Yes. So, getting crossing leg up and over, probably?

**Kyle Pinion:**

Yeah.

**Shaina Meyer:**

One of the things I tell people first to try is to try to use a small step stool to be able to just lift your foot up with your hands clasped under your thigh and lift your leg up onto that step stool that decreases the amount of space that you have to lean forward towards the floor if that's the way you're doing it.

Also, you may just want to then use elastic shoelaces or get shoes that are slip ons, but that are well fitted. There's a lot of shoes they make now that stretch when you go to put them on and then they form back to your foot and then you don't have to bring your foot all the way up.

They also make sock-aides to help put your sock on. There is a picture in my slides of a sock aid. It's where you put the sock onto a tube, and you throw the tube on the ground and you can pull your sock on. They make shoehorns as well where you can use a shoehorn to put in the back of your shoe. That way as you're pushing your foot in, it doesn't get that annoying slide down of the back where then you have to reach down and kind of swoop back a bit.

**Kyle Pinion:**

Would some of those devices also potentially help someone who is attempting to move their leg from a seated position into bed every night?

**Shaina Meyer:**

Moving from a seated position into bed is tricky. It depends on kind of what you're having trouble with. If weakness is present and you can't get your leg to come up into the bed, you can use a leg lifter. They make leg lifters. It looks like you're going to walk an invisible dog. It's got this little loop on the end. You can loop that on your foot and then you can use it to lift your leg up and in bed. That is challenging and tricky, though, if you have spasticity or if your trunk control does not allow for you to then make that movement or you have trouble gripping it. So, if you are having trouble with that, I highly recommend to go see a therapist and figure out the best way for you to get in and out of bed. For some people, they can even just use the bed rail to kind of help use their momentum to get their leg up and in bed.

**Kyle Pinion:**

Thank you, Shaina...

**Shaina Meyer:**

Can you see my slides? Can you see those shampoo brushes?

**Kyle Pinion:**

Yeah, we see the shampoo brushes on Google.

**Shaina Meyer:**

OK, perfect. That's it. Yeah.

**Kyle Pinion:**

I got that purple one right there.

**Shaina Meyer:**

Excellent! Mine is kind of like this one. It's got like these big silicone bristles, but this is what the shampoo brushes... And as you can see, it has a nice, most of them have a nice little grip so you can just slide your hand right in there. So, if you do have hand weakness, you can still get your hands in there and use it.

**Kyle Pinion:**

Well, fabulous. Shaina, these were such great answers. This was such a great presentation. You know, this is one of the first, I think, occupational therapy webinars I can remember we've given at MSAA. And I tell you, it's just such a great... I don't know how we'll ever top it. So, thank you.

**Shaina Meyer:**

There's so much to talk about. So, depending on all the feedback just let me know what else you all need. There's so much out there we could hone in on and go more in depth on. But yeah, I'd be happy to.

**Kyle Pinion:**

We'd love to do it. So, for everyone else, this concludes tonight's webinar. I would like to once again thank Shaina for her insights into occupational therapy within the MS community. I think



we can all say we learned a ton about the subject. We are so, so grateful for her time and expertise. As mentioned, tonight's webinar will be archived to MSAA's website, and we ask you to take a very brief survey that is coming up next, you'll probably see it in a window that says to click here to go to Survey Monkey. So that's from us. It's not a pop up. That's from us. Your feedback is critical to ensure our programs are relevant and impactful. So please just take a couple of minutes to answer a few questions for us. And on behalf of MSAA and Shaina, we thank you so much for joining us.

Thanks, everybody. Have a great night.