Being a Mom with MS

by LIBBY SELINSKY

So Many Questions

So you have been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. What about your children? Can you have them? Should you have them? What will life be like for your children?

These are just some of the questions that cross the mind of a person who has MS. My biggest struggle with my diagnosis was reconciling my role as a parent to my serious, often disabling and, for now, incurable disease.

I know that I am not alone in this struggle. How do we walk our new, unworn, involuntary path?

Can You Have Children After Diagnosis?

Yes, you can have children. Pregnancy does not progress your MS. Realistically, the likelihood that you will have progression during your pregnancy is very low.

There are some considerations in regards to your medications that need to be discussed with your physician; some medications can cause birth defects. You will need to choose carefully which medication is safest, for the interim, before you begin trying to have children.

Once you decide to have a child, you will need to talk to your doctor to decide when it will be best for you to stop using your disease modifying drugs and when to begin them again.

How to Create a Happy Home?

How do I build a happy home? This is the question that all parents have on their minds. Having MS seems to electrify the emotion and light up the question in neon hues, highlighting all the doubts and fears that we tuck away in our minds.

The answer to the question takes many forms and looks so different from what we imagine. Though, looking back on the years that have passed since my diagnosis, I have found that the years are better, more full than they would have been without my disease.

The truth is, you're still very capable of cultivating something of beauty within this new world of uncertainty. You are also giving your children the gift of understanding life in all of it's faults and shortcomings.

What It Is Really All About

When I had my first child I was not yet diagnosed with MS. I had had a hard life as a child and I was hell bent on ensuring that my children had the most safe, stable and loving homes on the planet. My diagnosis felt like God was spitting in my face and ripping away all of my abilities to provide that life for my family.

Regretfully, due to my fears, combined with some misinformation from my neurologist, I decided that I should not have a second child. My years since have become a sort of paradoxical countdown.

I want to enjoy and hang onto every moment that we have together, but I also want my son to be grown and out of the house before I am not physically capable of caring for myself. I want the time that I have raising him to be filled with vibrant, meaningful moments that do not hold him back.

That is what we all want, right?

Next page: building a solid foundation for your children.

A Solid Foundation

What are the important things to remember while parenting? I have some tenets that have worked well for me so far.

Firstly, you have to care for your body. Again, this is true for any parent, but MS makes it even more important. For me, this means:

- I take my medicine, on time, every day. I do not miss a dose. In the past seven years I have missed one dose. In my mind, I am not doing my job as a parent if I am not staying religiously on course with my medicine.
- I must keep my diet clean and healthy. I do not drink pop or eat fast or processed foods. I've found a diet that is healthy and I adamantly stick with it.
- I have to remain active. I have had to relearn how to exercise and what my limitations are, but I stay true to the knowledge that a body in motion is a body that stays in motion.
- I rest when I need to. Your body will tear you down and hold you back if you do not listen to it now. You must rest when you feel things slowing down. You will be back on your feet more quickly and more often this way.

Secondly, you have to care for your spirit. Stress has a direct effect on your wellbeing, so create a low-stress life.

- Be sure that the relationships that you have in your life are healthy and do not tax your energy and time. Strong, beneficial relationships have a positive influence on our lives and teaches our children to have the same in their lives.
- Build a strong support system or maintain the one that you already have. Having people in your life who you can depend on in a pinch is a luxury and the importance of which, should never be underestimated when you are raising children.
- Make your life more convenient. (Try to live closer to work, doctors, stores, schools, etc.) Living near all of your needs will reduce the time and stress that comes along with commuting everywhere.

Thirdly, enjoy the time that you have. Focussing on yourself to begin with allows you more freedom to bask in all the great parts of being a parent later.

We all have our own ways of organizing our lives and our time. We all have different priorities in parenting. The list above is there to help you to sustain and thrive in the role that you carry.

Creating a strong foundation enables you to maintain some stability and security within the unpredictable world of MS.

There is no one clearcut path that MS provides. That is the shakespearian comedy of the whole ordeal. It is our place to create the beauty within the tragedy.

Your Children Will Thank You for It

It is important that we change our view of this disease. We must see this as an opportunity to enrich our children lives's. I am not saying that I enjoy having MS, but I do believe that hardship fosters growth.

Children need to learn empathy for people who are going through their own hardships. It is important that they understand peoples value and care for their situations. Having a parent, someone they love, in their life who deals with a daily body struggle allows children to understand that life is not fair, but it still has value and beauty.

We live in a world that distills its realities. It has become taboo to speak of death and disease. How many times have you heard, "She has MS, but she never talks about it," spoken in adoration, as a compliment. This is a disservice to everyone.

Sharing your experience with people is a favor. Humans need to face the facts that our bodies are not perfect and our world is not either. It is when we understand that our lives are fragile that we can find strength in our path. Our children are stronger and more capable to face the world because they learn from watching us everyday.

Having children is a choice that should never be hampered by the diagnosis of MS — you are no less a person for having it.