



## Dating 101

If you are living with multiple sclerosis, you may feel differently about yourself or have questions about dating. If your MS symptoms are invisible, one of the biggest questions can be when to reveal your diagnosis to someone you are dating. This is a very personal decision and can vary from person to person. Experts generally recommend sharing early, but not too early, which may mean waiting until the second or third date. Thinking about when and how you would want someone to share similar information with you is one way to help guide your decisions. If you have questions or concerns about this aspect of your life, talk to your provider or therapist.

The common characteristics of good relationships are respect and safety. This means respect for self and others. It also means that both people in the relationship feel physically and emotionally safe. Let's begin with respect.

### Respect for Self and Others

- If you want to spend time with someone, try approaching him/her in a friendly, confident manner.
- Avoid attitudes like, "You don't really want to go out with me, do you?" You probably will not get many positive responses with that line. If you do not respect and value yourself, the other person will likely share your beliefs!
- On the other hand, avoid overdoing it with too much confidence. Using an approach like you are doing the person a favor by dating them will generally assure rejection.
- Remember that relationships grow slowly. It takes time to nurture feelings and for love and friendship to grow. Go slowly.
- Avoid talking about intense or very serious topics on the first few dates. Try talking about more usual topics such as sports, current events, music, community activities, etc. This would also include not talking about your personal physical care.
- Do not plan a heavy conversation about sex until you both are feeling relaxed and safe. Feelings of safety and relaxation do not happen on the first date. Remember to take things slowly.



- Pay close attention to the messages the other person is sending you. Ask questions and listen to the answers. Get to know each other.

### Feeling Safe in the Relationship

- Feelings of safety involve knowing that one is not expected to do something that one is not ready or prepared to do.
- It means saying "no" or taking "no" for an answer without pouting, begging or coercing. It means enough trust exists between two people that saying "no" is okay.
- It means you and your partner keep private things about your relationship private. Neither one of you "kiss and tell" nor make up stories to others about your dates.
- Safety also involves being honest with your partner. Have courage to tell the truth about issues in your relationship. Avoid "not telling the truth because you don't want to hurt his/her feelings."

### What if Something Embarrassing Happens on the Date?

- It is possible that something unexpected could happen while you are on a date. Since your diagnosis, you may have relapses that cause sudden changes in your mobility, energy levels or body functions. These may never happen during your dating, but if they do, be prepared on how you would like to handle them.

### Keep in Mind...

- Remember that not all dates will become lasting romantic relationships.
- Before you were diagnosed with MS, some dates were fun and some dates were duds. Some first dates turned into second dates and others did not. Someone may have rejected you. Everyone experiences rejection at some time in their life, so be careful not to assume rejection is due to your MS.
- If you always get rejected, it may be helpful to look at why.
- There are many factors that determine if a relationship will work.