

Working with MS

INFORMATION FOR EMPLOYEES
LIVING WITH MS



National
Multiple Sclerosis
Society

ELLECIA
DIAGNOSED IN 2011

Should I work?

MS does not mean the end of being and feeling productive. You should work...if you want to. The real question involves how, where and at what level you will work.

Many people leave the work force when they are first diagnosed or experience a major exacerbation, making a big change in the middle of a crisis. But MS lasts a lifetime and may fluctuate unpredictably, produce different symptoms at different times, and may never become disabling.

It takes time to discover how symptoms can be managed, and whether they will affect a current job or a planned career. Try not make any big decisions — review your situation, get educated, and connect to available resources to help with your career management.

If you are employed and need time to manage your health, investigate sick leave policy, short-term disability insurance coverage, or the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) which provides for job protected leave without pay. When the crisis resolves, explore more options. It is often easier to return to work than to find a new job.

Before talking to your employer or doing anything that may have longstanding consequences, get professional advice. Call the National MS Society (1-800-344-4867) to be connected to an MS Navigator. Ask for referrals to an occupational therapist, your local vocational rehabilitation office, and other employment-related resources. Also, ask for information about the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and accommodation strategies to help you remain productive and comfortable on the job.

The ADA is a civil rights law which includes several key provisions that may help with employment issues:

- An employee must be able to perform the essential functions of a job, but unessential functions can and should be assigned to others.
- An employee may request reasonable accommodations to perform duties of the job; the employee researches and proposes the accommodations.
- An employee **may not have to disclose a specific medical diagnosis** in order to obtain ADA protections — initially. However, an employee **must disclose a disability in order to ask for accommodations** to help maintain productivity in spite of a medical condition. The employer may then require additional documentation and/or a medical diagnosis.

Some examples of reasonable accommodations include flex-time (adjusted work schedule) or telecommuting, parking privileges, equipment or software that enhances work performance, and combining short breaks into a longer rest period.

Will working increase my stress?

The physical and emotional effects of MS may cause stress, but a direct relationship between stress and the onset or worsening of MS has not been established. The relationship between employment, stress and MS is also complex. Employment provides social interaction, income, work benefits such as health insurance and is associated with a higher quality of life. For these reasons, unemployment could make your stress worse. If your MS symptoms are significantly impacting your ability to work, seek guidance from your healthcare providers on whether continuing to work is appropriate. Remember, though, that the decision to continue or stop working is yours.

Strategies for managing stress in the workplace include counseling, support groups, exercise and improved diet and wellness. Visit [nationalMSSociety.org/Living-Well-With-MS](https://www.nationalmssociety.org/Living-Well-With-MS) to learn more.

Resources you may need

- JAN (Job Accommodation Network)
800-526-7234, 877-781-9403 (TTY)
askJAN.org
- ADA National Network
800-949-4232 (V/TTY)
adata.org
- Employment information
**nationalMSSociety.org/
employment**
- Employment-related brochures
nationalMSSociety.org/brochures
(including information on disclosure,
accommodations, and for employers)

The National Multiple Sclerosis Society is proud to be a source of information on MS-related topics. The information provided is based on professional advice, published experience, and expert opinion, but does not constitute medical or legal advice. For specific medical advice, consult a qualified physician. For specific legal advice, consult a qualified attorney.



DAVID
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The National MS Society's mission is for people affected by MS to live their best lives as we stop MS in its tracks, restore what has been lost and end MS forever. To fulfill this mission, the Society funds cutting-edge research, drives change through advocacy, facilitates professional education, collaborates with MS organizations around the world, and provides programs and services designed to help people with MS and their families move their lives forward.

Early and ongoing treatment with an FDA-approved therapy can make a difference for people with multiple sclerosis. Learn about your options by talking to your healthcare professional and contacting the National MS Society at **[nationalMSSociety.org](https://www.nationalMSSociety.org)** or 1-800-344-4867.



**National
Multiple Sclerosis
Society**

[nationalMSSociety.org](https://www.nationalMSSociety.org)

1-800-344-4867