

How Does Aging Affect My MS and Vice Versa?

CAN DO
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WEBINAR 
WEDNESDAYS

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APRIL PROGRAMS

Thursday, April 16

JUMPSTART

MS and Aging: Living Your Best Life

Tuesday, April 21

NEWLY DIAGNOSED MEETUPS

Your Choices Matter: Impacting
Your Future with MS

Tuesday, April 28

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

Sorting Out Symptoms: MS or Aging

Wednesday, April 29

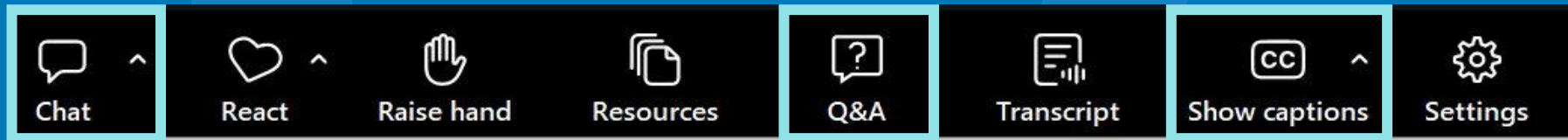
MS MOVES MEETUPS



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How to Ask Questions During the Webinar

Type in your questions
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using the **Chat Box**

Closed captioning

YOUR SPEAKERS



Sam Balistreri
Physical Therapist

Pennsylvania



Alyx Rossi
Nurse Practitioner

Texas

LEARNING OBJECTIVES



- 1 Learn ways that aging impacts the brain and brain functions
- 2 Understand the role of co-morbid health conditions in aging and MS
- 3 Learn how to function optimally regardless of the cause(s) of change

**Is this MS, aging, or
something else?**





Have you ever wondered:



- Is this symptom from my MS?
- Is it just aging?
- Or is something else going on?



This question is incredibly common



How Aging Affects the Brain

As we age, the brain naturally changes:

Slower processing speed

Changes in immune function



Reduced repair capacity

Slight memory changes

This happens **with or without MS**

Aging of Immune System (Simplified)

What is immunosenescence?

- ➔ The immune system becomes less responsive with age
- ➔ In a *select* MS patient populations, this can mean reduced likelihood for new disease activity
- ➔ Healing and repair take longer, less neuroplasticity



Chromosome Changes

It's not just our immune cells that change as we age

- ➔ Chromosomes are the long, thread-like structures made up of DNA that carry our genetic information.
- ➔ Over our lifetime, as cells divide, these telomeres get shorter. This shortening can happen more quickly in people with *MS* than it does in normal ageing.
- ➔ Shorter telomeres have been linked to higher disability levels and a reduction in brain volume (atrophy).

Aging Brain vs. MS Brain



Both aging and MS affect:

- Nerve repair
- Myelin health
- Brain volume
- Cognitive efficiency

This is why symptoms can **overlap**.



POLLING QUESTION

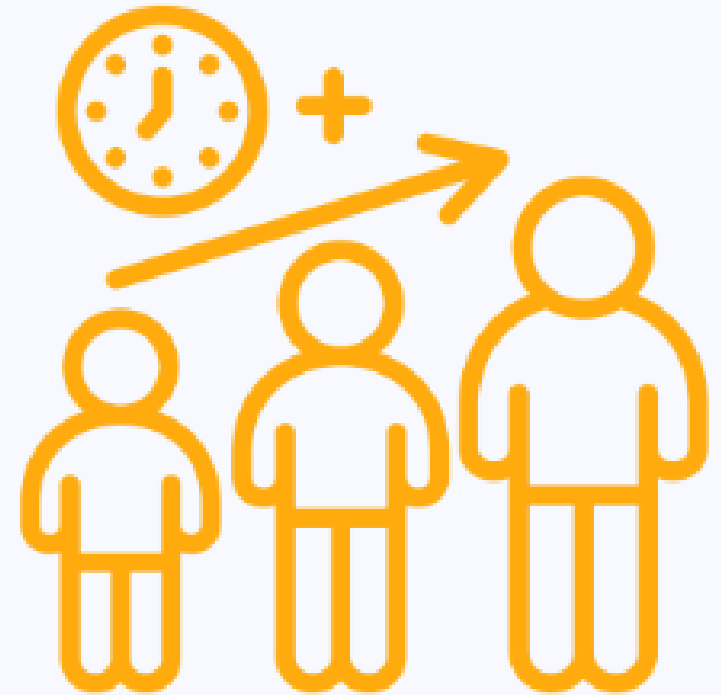
What change have you noticed most over time?

- a) Physical stamina
- b) Memory or thinking speed
- c) Balance or mobility
- d) Fatigue
- e) Mood or stress tolerance
- f) Other (write it in the chat!)

How MS Changes With Age

In general:

- Relapses often decrease with age
- Progression may increase
- Inflammation becomes less dominant
- Neurodegeneration becomes more important



Mobility and Physical Function



As we age:

- Muscle mass declines (sarcopenia)
- Balance changes
- Endurance decreases



When MS is present, these changes can compound each other



Fall Risk



Why falls increase:

- Weakness
- Balance issues
- Slower reaction time
- Medication side effects



**Falls are preventable
and manageable**

The Hidden Layer: Comorbidities



Not Everything Is MS



Many symptoms people attribute to MS may be caused by:

- Heart disease
- Diabetes
- Thyroid disorders
- Sleep apnea

- Depression
- Medication effects
- Perimenopause/
menopause
- Deconditioning



POLLING QUESTION

**Have you ever had a symptom
blamed on *MS* that turned out to
be something else?**

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Unsure

Why Comorbidities Matter



These conditions can:

- Worsen fatigue
- Affect mobility
- Impact cognition
- Accelerate disability



Managing them can significantly improve quality of life.



Treatment and Aging



MS Medications and Aging

Emerging reserach questions

- Do DMTs work as we age?
- When should treatments continue or stop?
- What are the risks of infection?

The studies:

- DISCO-MS Study
- ESCALATE Research

Key Message

This is a highly individualized decision between you and your neurologist.

The Positive Side: Healthy Aging with MS



Brain Health Is Possible



Even with MS, many things support healthy aging:



Physical Activity



Sleep Quality



Cognitive Engagement



Social Connection



Managing Cardiovascular Health



Mental Health

Diet and Aging with MS

Research suggests that what you eat may help with some MS symptoms—especially fatigue and overall quality of life.

Unprocessed or minimally processed food

Natural foods or those with minimal changes (e.g., cut, ground, pasteurized).



Processed culinary ingredients

Basic ingredients used in cooking, made from whole foods (e.g., oil, sugar, salt).



Processed foods

Foods made by adding ingredients like salt, sugar, or oil to whole foods.



Ultra-processed foods

Highly manufactured foods with added flavors, colors, and other additives.



Brain Reserve

The brain can build resistance through:





POLLING QUESTION

Which area would you most like to improve in the next year?

- a) Physical activity
- b) Cognitive health
- c) Sleep
- d) Stress management
- e) Social connection

Not everything you experience is MS



Sometimes it's:



Understanding the difference helps you focus on what you can change

Aging with MS is not just about decline

It's about:

- Adaptation
- Prevention
- Resilience
- Partnership with your care team



Links to Can Do Resources

- [Fatigue](#)
- [Mobility](#)
- [Cognition](#)
- [Care team communication tools](#)



Q+A



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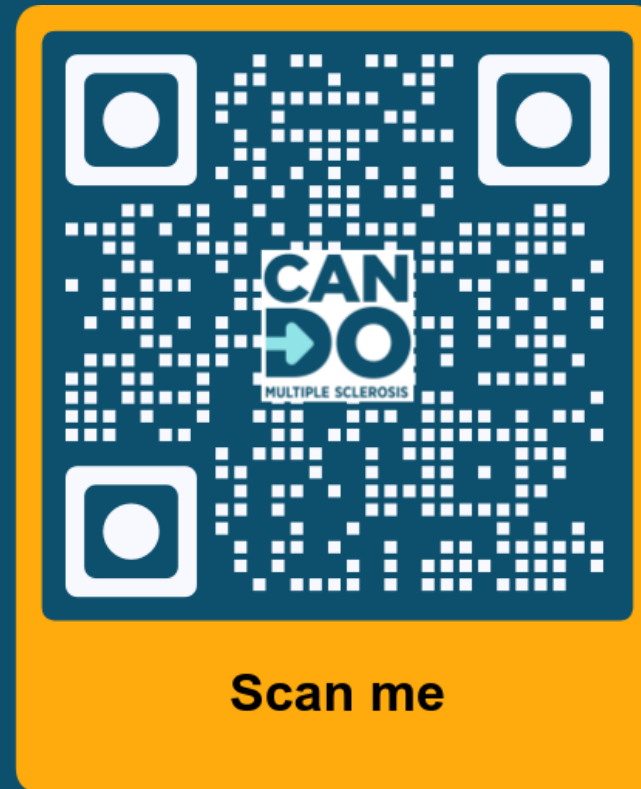


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Next Month:

Therapy Approaches To Help You Thrive with MS

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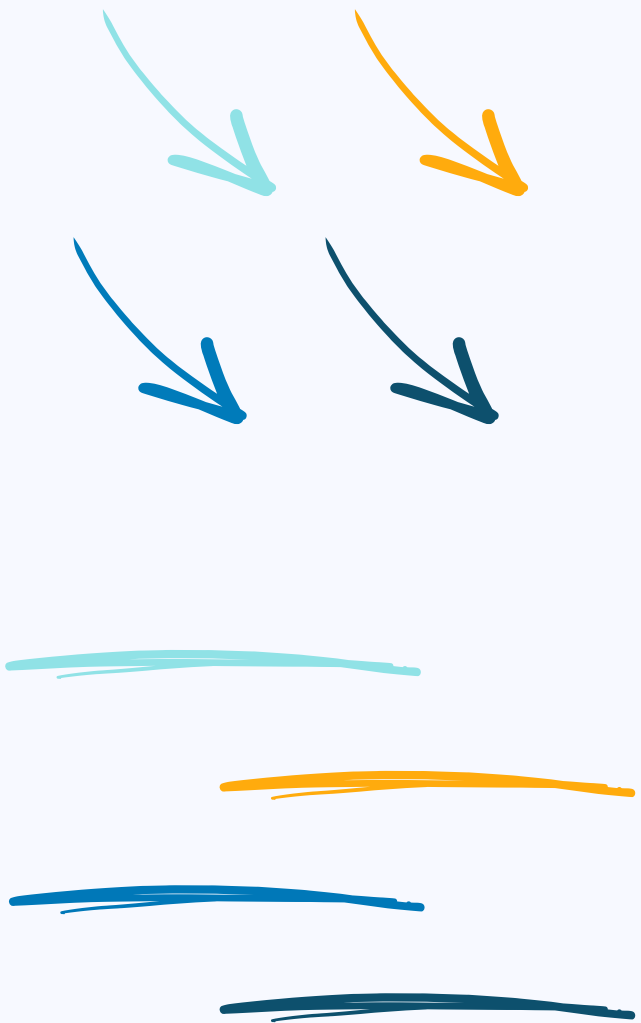
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Soft Cyan #90E3E7	✔ Aa ✔	✔ Aa ✔ Aa
Optimistic Orange #FFAB0E		✔ Aa ✔ Aa

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