intouch

Autumn / Winter 2025

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From the CEO

John Blewonski | Chief Executive Officer

Welcome to your first Intouch magazine for 2025.

These past few months have certainly been an exciting and busy time for MS Plus. Back in November, I had an incredible day at Lang Park in Wollongong, the finish line for this year's Gong Ride.

It was a joy to share the experience with 6,500 riders who journeyed down from Sydney, along with enthusiastic family members, friendly locals, our amazing volunteer crew — all managing to raise an impressive $1.3 million for people living with MS.

We'll be preparing for our 2026 Gong Ride soon and we would love you to join, so keep an eye on the website.

We then kicked off the first of our legacy Mega Challenge events with the Fitzroy swim in February, which raised more than $128,000!

This year we are delivering our Walk, Run + Roll events a little differently, spreading individual state events out between March and May, to make sure everyone has a chance to get involved!

We have just wrapped up another successful Sydney event, with Launceston not far behind on Sunday 6 April. There is still plenty of time to sign up and for our Canberra run on Sunday 4 May and Melbourne run on Sunday 18 May.

Perhaps the biggest event on our calendar this year has been the launch of our state-of-the-art Lidcombe Wellbeing Centre, including our hotel-style long and short-term supported accommodation.

The new centre represents our growing commitment to supporting our broader neurological community and those aged over 65.

Our **Strategic Directions 2020–2025** will have run its course in July 2025, and recently the MS Plus Board and myself reviewed our progress and achievements against the plan and I acknowledge our dedicated staff in helping the organisation to achieve the many milestones laid out in this plan over the past five years. We will now begin work on our **Strategic Directions 2025–2027**, with careful consideration be given to the following:

- Ongoing organisational **Sustainability**
- Service growth and **Development**
- Opportunities to drive and support **Innovation**
- A focus on **Partnerships**
- The importance of our **People**

I look forward to shaping these goals in the coming months and delivering on these aspirations in the coming years – to the benefit of all those living with neurological conditions and our over 65s community.

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6 APRIL 2025
INVERESK PRECINCT, INVERMAY

CANBERRA

4 MAY 2025
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18 MAY 2025
PALM LAWN, ALBERT PARK

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A trip to Japan made possible with the right supports

Cara — who loves to travel — was excited to book the family's dream trip to Japan; meant as a well-deserved reward for them all after enduring years of pandemic lockdowns.

Then, four months before Cara and her family were scheduled to leave, she received her MS diagnosis.

'I was diagnosed in March 2023, and we had booked to leave in July.

'I was suddenly unsure about whether I would be able to go, and what a holiday might look like for me now. There was a lot of uncertainty,' Cara says.

Reaching out to an MS nurse turned out to be a confidence booster, helping Cara to navigate her new diagnosis and giving her hope the trip could go ahead.

'It was all very overwhelming initially but with my MS Nurse Advisor, Jane Gilliland's guidance, I felt I could implement strategies to manage my MS symptoms,' Cara says.

'The trip came not long after my diagnosis. Before I went away, I had experienced the impact of heat on my body but at the time I didn't know what it was, why it was happening and I was still very much learning to manage and understand my symptoms.

'Fortunately for me, Jane's suggestions were absolutely crucial to me being able to continue with the trip.'

Although her family could now look forward to the trip of a lifetime, Cara knew there would need to be some changes made.

'It was a lot more difficult than it had been in the past but with Jane's advice I was able to manage my symptoms whilst traveling.

'Jane suggested booking a wheelchair at the airport and to also take a portable chair with me, and she was absolutely right. Once I got to Japan, I found I couldn't walk to get off the plane and the wheelchair was vital to get me through customs and to the taxi.

'When I got to the hotel, I had difficulty standing up and at that point I realised my trip to Japan was going to look very different, and I would need to implement the strategies the nurses had given me to get through.

'I had a great time, but it was a lot trickier than I had anticipated, so I really appreciated Jane's advice.

Jane's tips around managing heat sensitivity turned out to be particularly helpful for Cara.

'A lot of my symptoms are triggered by heat, and we knew it would be very hot in Japan. Thanks to Jane, I remembered to have a portable fan, a spray bottle and wet piece of material and a cold compress.

Cara knew that information was power when it came to her MS diagnosis.

'When you're first diagnosed with a disease that you don't know much about, it's very confronting and my first urge was to get more information about the drugs I would be taking and how things might progress.

'The MS nurse advisor helped me with all of that. Jane educated me about what to expect and how to best manage my symptoms — ultimately, she put my mind at ease.

'You can't control the disease but by talking with an MS nurse advisor and having that trusted source of information on hand, it is possible to regain a sense of confidence in your future.

'If I had not had those conversations with the MS nurses, I probably wouldn't have gone to Japan. There is help out there and you can continue to try new things, you might just need a few different strategies to get you through.'

To chat to an MS Nurse Advisor phone **1800 042 138** or email **connect@msplus.org.au**

Tamworth Peer Support Facilitator Marianne wins MS Australia award

Congratulations to our very own Marianne Gaul AM, retired nurse and dedicated MS advocate who facilitates peer support networks for people living with MS across Tamworth and western NSW.

Marianne is this year's MS Australia MS Advocacy Award winner, in recognition of her lasting impact on the MS community.

The MS Australia Awards recognise people who raise awareness about MS and champion the needs of those living with the condition.

MS Australia CEO Rohan Greenland praised Marianne's selfless dedication to the MS community, recognising her invaluable support to others living with the condition.

"Marianne embodies the true spirit of advocacy. Her dedication to peer support, fundraising, and community leadership has made a real and lasting difference to so many lives."

Diagnosed with MS in 2007 at the peak of her 45-year nursing career, Marianne faced her condition with the same commitment to care and service that defined her professional life.

"At that time, I was employed as a Clinical Nurse Consultant for Rural Emergency Care, a position I held for 25 years, supporting clinicians in 20 rural hospitals in northern NSW," Marianne said.

Marianne retired in 2013 after a career devoted to improving rural healthcare and was made a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for her services to nursing. However, her commitment to helping others didn't end with her professional career.

She found fulfilment in volunteering — spending 10 years with a local Lions Club before joining MS Plus Peer Support, where she was inspired by her own experience with MS to support others facing similar challenges.

As a Peer Support Facilitator, Marianne oversees group peer support sessions, provides individual telephone support, and leads volunteer catch-ups, ensuring people with MS receive emotional and practical assistance while fostering collaboration among the team of volunteers.

"My passion is supporting people living with MS," Marianne said. "I find much gratitude and satisfaction in facilitating groups, offering one-on-one support, and helping people navigate the challenges of living with MS."

Of her many accomplishments, Marianne is most proud of the meaningful connections she has built within the MS community.

"It's very rewarding to see what a difference you can make to people's lives through monthly meetings a friendly phone call, or a card that acknowledges a special occasion such as a birthday or becoming a grandparent," she said.

In 2024, MS Australia expanded its annual awards program, introducing two new awards open to public nomination, the MS Research Award and the MS Advocate Award.

These awards complement the program's legacy of celebrating outstanding service through the prestigious John Studdy Award.

This year's other award recipients include:

MS Research Award: Professor Jeannette Lechner-Scott, Newcastle, NSW

Professor Lechner-Scott is a globally recognised leader in MS research and MS Plus Board Member, with decades of groundbreaking work spanning disease mechanisms, biomarkers, and clinical trials. Her current studies, including the impact of pregnancy on MS, continue to inform treatment strategies and improve patient care.

John Studdy Award: Lynda Whitton, Bunbury, WA

Lynda has dedicated three decades to advocacy, leadership, and fundraising in the MS community. As President of the Bunbury Outreach Group and founder of the Bunbury Swim fundraising event, she has made a profound difference in Western Australia and beyond, helping to establish vital support networks and services.

THE MAY 50K

MOVE 50KM IN MAY TO LEAVE MS WHERE IT BELONGS, BEHIND US.

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Legal issues for older people

Plan ahead: what you need to know about decision making in older age

Tuesday 29 April, 9:30am–11:00am
Lidcombe Wellbeing Centre, refreshments provided

There are steps you can take to ensure that decisions made on your behalf are the right ones for you. Join Seniors Rights Service to better understand your rights, the opportunities for pre-planning and where to find more help. Register now.

Support to keep you working

We're here to help you every step of the way, until you feel secure in your current job or have found the right role for you.

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MS
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Ask a Nurse Advisor

Q: I've just been diagnosed with MS. How do I choose the right treatment?

A: Choosing a treatment for MS can feel overwhelming. There's a lot to take in, and decisions often need to be made quickly. It's completely normal to feel unsure. A good place to start is by talking with your neurologist, MS clinic, or MS nurse. They can help you understand your options and what might be the best fit for you.

One way to approach this decision is to think about how you want your MS to be in the future. Do you want to minimise its impact on your daily life? Reduce the risk of disability progression? Once you have a sense of that, you can look at which treatments are most closely aligned with achieving that outcome.

We know from research that starting treatment early—particularly with a highly effective option—can lead to better long-term outcomes. Your neurologist will usually recommend what they believe is the most appropriate treatment for you, based on the latest evidence. Sometimes, they'll offer a few options but highlight the one they feel is the best choice.

Efficacy is usually the main consideration when choosing a treatment. Beyond that, you might also want to think about practical factors, like whether a tablet, injection, or infusion suits you best, and which potential side effects feel most manageable.

It's a big decision, and there's a lot to wrap your head around in a short time. Asking questions and getting the right information can help you feel more confident. If you'd like to talk things through, our MS Nurse Advisors offer free 45-minute phone appointments to provide extra support. We're here to help every step of the way.

Phone Plus Connect **1800 042 138** or email **connect@msplus.org.au**

Ask an EP

Q: I experience fatigue, wouldn't exercise make this worse?

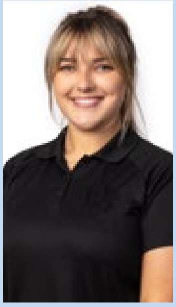
A: Not quite. With any type of increase in activity there may be an initial increase in fatigue levels for some. The key to overcoming this and eventually reducing the overall impact of MS symptoms such as fatigue is repetition and consistency. The benefits of working alongside a neuro-experienced exercise physiologist is that we are uniquely qualified and experienced in assisting you navigating your fatigue whilst increasing your activity levels.

We can:

- assess your personal level of cardiovascular fitness/flexibility and strength
- understand what triggers your fatigue and if there are times of the day/seasons (i.e. summer) that tend to make this worse
- assist in improving tolerance to exercise duration and intensity
- employ tailored cardio and strength training routines
- ensure you rest and recover adequately afterwards

Your EP will work with you to ensure you are able to enjoy all the benefits of exercise in managing your neuro symptoms.

Find out more about how EP can help you manage your symptoms **msplus.org.au/ExercisePhysiology**



EP Talita Welmans, Hobart Wellbeing Centre

Want more news, tips and support to help you manage your neurological condition?

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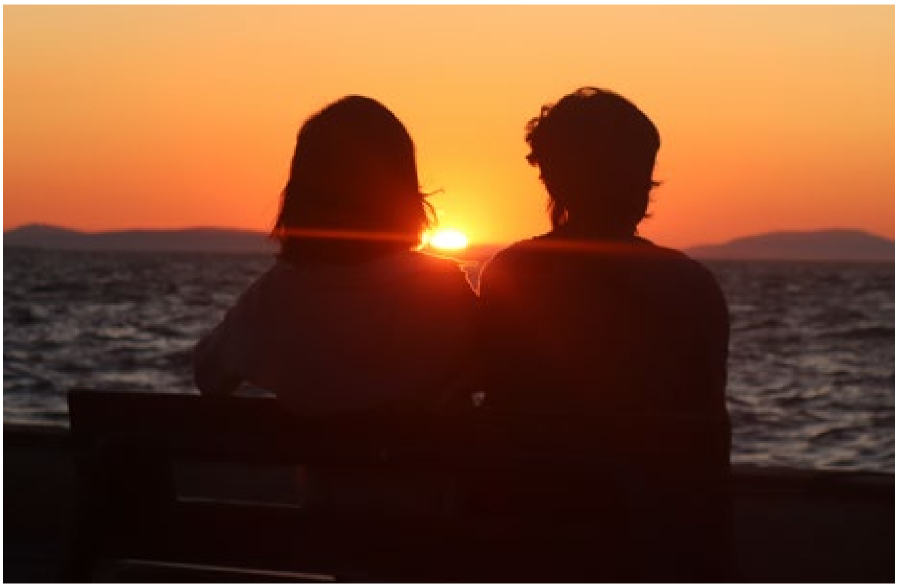
Subscribe today.

‘I’m still a husband and father first but I am also a carer’



Harpreet’s wife Priya was diagnosed with MS in 2009. Not long after her diagnosis, Priya’s conditioned developed to the point where she needed to stop working.

‘It was quite sudden, no one saw it coming. She had had a substantial relapse and by the morning she couldn’t get out of bed, couldn’t stand or anything. The shock of the situation really affected her a lot,’ Harpreet says.

Beginning to take on a carer role

Harpreet says the level of support Priya needs has gradually increased over the years.

With Priya increasingly unable to help to complete her usual day-to-day tasks, Harpreet began taking on more responsibilities.

‘After diagnosis, responsibilities for managing the home and family became mine, including making meals, cleaning-up, shopping and generally keeping the home running.

One of the biggest adjustments to his new role as a carer for Harpreet was having to pull back from his working life.

‘My work used to involve a fair bit of travel and long hours which was no longer possible as Priya’s MS symptoms became pronounced quite quickly.

‘I needed to take something closer to home without travel or long hours as I could no longer leave Priya alone in the evenings. This meant taking roles with reduced responsibilities and further reducing this over time to make sure I could support Priya as her needs changed.

‘Like a lot of people, you associate a sense of personal esteem with your work and your ability to work but I have come to terms with this now,’ Harpreet says.

The impact on the family

Harpreet said they both worried about the impact of Priya’s MS on their children.

‘The worry about what the future looked like was monumental. Of course, there were also concerns about how this would impact our children. My daughter had just finished high school, and we still had two boys at school.’

‘Going through these challenges did affect them but in a funny kind of way also brought the family together a bit more.

‘I don’t want them to become carers for their mum, I want them to follow their own life journeys, wherever it takes them, without being constrained to the best of my abilities’

The importance of finding your village

‘Some of our friends have shown their strength in such wonderful ways that I wouldn’t have expected. Our network of both medical and allied health support is also so important.

‘Importantly, I would recommend you maintain your friendships — these are an incredible part of your informal supports. Don’t let them go. For both the person living with MS and the person caring for them. Just their presence in your life and moral support can keep your spirits strong.’

Taking time to recharge your batteries

‘We all walk around our lives with multiple roles and multiple hats. I am a carer but I’m still a husband and a father first.

‘While I know I have a very important role as a carer, I don’t want it to define my life. I try to maintain some level of independence and it’s important for me to get out and about as much as possible.

‘Ultimately, we all deal with situations in different ways. For me, over time acceptance has become the most important thing.’

Read Harpreet’s full story.

Mental Health and MS

A FREE online course to enhance understanding of mental health and its interaction with anxiety, depression and MS.

Duration: self-paced
Effort: 1.5-2 hours per module
Completion certificate: Yes

The course consists of three modules. On successful completion you will be able to:

- Explain what mental health is and how it differs from mental illness
- Describe the symptoms and early signs of anxiety and depression
- Explain the relationship between MS and anxiety and depression
- Describe some strategies for improving or maintaining mental health.

This course was developed by the MS Research Flagship, Menzies Institute for Medical Research at the University of Tasmania in collaboration with the MS community and the Wicking Dementia Research and Education Centre.

Funding for the course development has been provided by the Australian Government.

Enrol today.

Do polyunsaturated fatty acid levels affect the risk of MS?

A fatty acid is a building block of fats. It's a type of molecule that combines with others to form the fats found in our food and bodies.

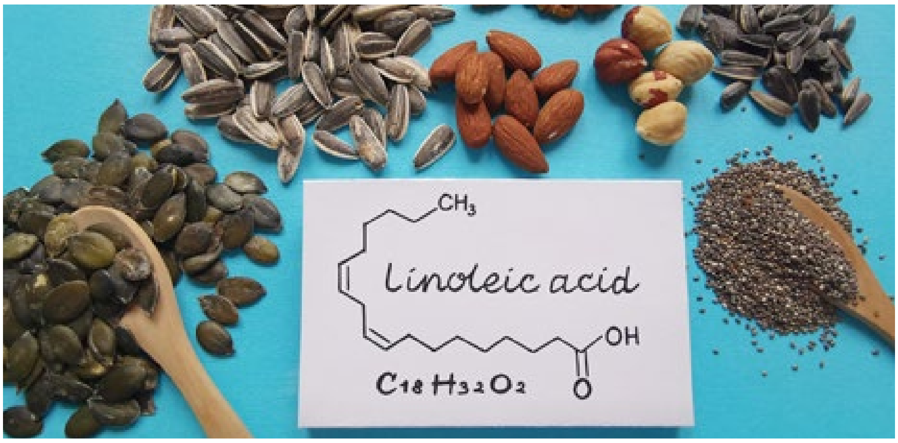
Think of it like a small piece of a puzzle that, when put together with other pieces, makes up the whole picture of a fat molecule.

Fats made up of polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFAs) are found in many plant-based oils (such as seed and nut oils) and in fish oils.

PUFAs include omega-6 fatty acids and omega-3 fatty acids. Both types of PUFAs have anti-inflammatory properties. As MS is an inflammatory disease, both omega-3 and omega-6 PUFAs may be able to reduce the risk of MS onset or slow its progression.

Examples of foods high in omega-6 fatty acids include safflower, sunflower and canola oils, tofu, walnuts and almonds.

Examples of foods high in omega-3 fatty acids include flaxseeds, chia seeds, walnuts, soybeans and oily fish.



What did researchers find?
MS Australia-supported researchers, including Dr Eleanor Dunlop and Associate Professor Lucinda Black, analysed the fatty acid profiles of blood samples taken from 589 people diagnosed with MS or clinically isolated syndrome (CIS), and 630 people without MS.

They found having a higher total level of omega-6 PUFAs may be helpful in reducing the risk of developing MS. This suggests that including foods rich in omega-6 PUFAs in a diet is beneficial.

However, more study is needed to determine whether higher levels of omega-3 PUFAs would lower the risk of developing MS.

MS Australia recommends that people with and without MS follow the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating, which is also detailed in the Adapting Your Lifestyle Guide.

This guide, developed by MS Australia in collaboration with national experts and people affected by MS, provides practical recommendations for evidence-based lifestyle changes that may benefit aspects of MS, including relapses, disability, and other symptoms, and improve overall quality of life.

Read the full article.

Opening our new Lidcombe Wellbeing Centre

A new era in neuro wellbeing and healthy ageing begins!

It was heartwarming to see so many of our clients, staff and local healthcare community come together in February for our special Lidcombe Wellbeing Centre pre-launch event!

Clients, together with local health providers, were able to tour the incredible new facility, including our hotel-style high physical support needs long term and respite accommodation, meet our staff and learn more about the services we offer to support healthy ageing and those living with a broad range of neurological conditions.

Our network of NSW health professionals then joined us for a special neuro education session, featuring an incredible panel of experts: Neurologist Dr Justin Garber, Geriatrician & CMO, Dr Des Graham, Neuro Physiotherapist Dr Phu Hoang and Disability Employment Specialist Jeffrey Lawrence. Thank you to our panel for their incredible insights. The group's discussion on the benefits and challenges of integrated care for neurological clients was an important step to progressing neuro patient outcomes through a multidisciplinary approach.

The session also highlighted the power of preventative healthcare as we age, shifting the focus to wellbeing and early intervention to minimise the need for acute care — to improve quality of life for over 65s.

Of course, a warm thank you to everyone who came along throughout the day. A special shout out to our regional clients — with some travelling from up to four hours away to attend! The event was truly a celebration of the power of community and collaboration.

The official centre launch was held on 5 March, as a thank you to all our supporters, who made the Lidcombe Wellbeing Centre a reality.

To find out more about how our team at the Lidcombe Wellbeing Centre can help support you, scan the QR code or head to msplus.org.au/LidcombeWellbeing

We are now accepting applications for our long term and report supported accommodation.

To find out more visit msplus.org.au/LidcombeHome or email lidcombesda@msplus.org.au

Deciding about Disease Modifying Therapies (DMTs) for MS

A FREE online course that aims to increase understanding about DMTs, help people communicate clearly about them and help people living with MS make informed decisions about using them.

This includes deciding about starting, switching and stopping DMTs.

The course consists of three modules. On successful completion you will be able to:

- explain what DMTs are and how they affect a person's body and MS
- describe the major types of DMTs
- discuss the major types of considerations affecting a person's selection of DMTs
- understand why a neurologist might recommend switching or stopping DMTs
- describe effective communication and how that relates to deciding on DMTs for MS.

This course was developed by the MS Research Flagship, Menzies Institute for Medical Research at the University of Tasmania in collaboration with the MS community and the Wicking Dementia Research and Education Centre. Funding for the course development has been provided by the Australian Government.

Enrol today.

Symptom spotlight

Bladder and bowel

Your brain sends signals to control parts of your body, including the bladder and bowel, but MS can damage these connective signals.

Bladder dysfunction

Bladder dysfunction can develop because MS blocks or delays the nerve signals that control the bladder and urinary sphincter.

This can happen both at night and during the day.

The good news is that it can usually be managed quite successfully.

Treatment strategies include:

- managing your diet and fluids
- lifestyle factors including exercise
- taking certain medications
- intermittent or ongoing catheterisation (inserting a thin tube into the bladder to remove urine).

Bowel dysfunction

While symptoms of bowel dysfunction can be broad – including urgency, frequency and constipation – there are simple approaches you can take to help reduce these.

Working with your doctor or continence nurse, you can put together a simple plan to tackle bowel dysfunction. This plan could include:

- drinking enough water each day (about 8 cups per day)
- achieving a balanced and healthy diet each day
- reducing physical activity when symptoms occur and immediately after eating/drinking
- monitoring the impacts of any medications with your doctor.

For a confidential discussion with an MS Plus Continence Nurse, phone 1800 042 138 or email connect@msplus.org.au

Nursing a desire to help the MS community

In 2015, 21-year-old Cass David was working in a Melbourne dental clinic and considering a career in nursing. But then, she began to feel unwell.

"It started with headaches, and then my speech changed. My motor skills deteriorated next. I struggled to play my guitar," she recalls.

"The maxillofacial surgeon I worked with at the clinic told me to get an MRI. I did, and soon found out I had MS."

Cass tried to stay positive.

"Negativity and anger drain your energy and push people away. We all face challenges, and I thought, this is mine, but I'll do my best to manage it."

Her best meant pursuing her nursing degree and using her experience to help others.

While Cass doesn't usually share her diagnosis with patients, she knows that her dual role as a patient and a nurse gives her a unique perspective on pain management and resilience.

In the early stages, Cass's MS was aggressive, leading to frequent hospital stays. But thanks to new medications and self-care measures like a good diet, aerial yoga, massage and osteopathy, her condition improved.

In 2021, Cass and her partner moved to Alice Springs for "the adventure of a lifetime."

She became a flight nurse with the Royal Flying Doctors Service, flying thousands of kilometres across Australia to provide urgent care to patients in remote communities.

"You see everything from farm accidents and heart attacks to snakebites," she says.

Cass also works as an emergency care nurse at Alice Springs Hospital.

“I wanted to experience intense nursing now before my condition might limit me. Many people in rural communities have complex health issues, and you encounter conditions here that aren't as common in metropolitan settings. It's been invaluable learning,” she explains.

Throughout her MS journey, Cass has received support from MS Plus. The team helped her understand her condition, navigate the NDIS for equipment and connect with others living with MS.

Grateful for their assistance, Cass, now 30, has regularly donated to MS Plus. Recently, she took her commitment a step further by leaving a gift to MS Plus in her Will.

"I've received so much help from MS Plus. The research and services they provide wouldn't be possible without funding. My gift can go where it's most needed," she says.

Cass used Gathered Here, free online will-writing service and said it was easy to include a charity.

"It was straightforward. I'm happy knowing that my contribution will help others in the future.”

Cass's journey with MS hasn't been easy, but she remains optimistic.

"I've come a long way in 10 years. I lug a 25-kilo ventilator every time I get on a plane, but I can do it. I'm fortunate to be in a better place now, but I know not everyone with MS is as lucky. I don't take anything for granted. I want to live life to the fullest, and I want that for others, too."

Could you be like Cass? By including a gift of any size in your Will, you can leave a legacy of your own values. This way you can help MS Plus continue its vital work for a cure, better treatments and expanded services for people living with MS. Cass is now a member of the MS Callistemon League, a group of extraordinary people who are leaving a legacy of kindness, care, and ultimately – transformation.

For more information, contact Laura Henschke at **1800 443 867**, email **futureplanning@msplus.org.au** or visit **mymslegacy.org.au**

Could drugs that target EBV treat MS?

The link between EBV and MS

EBV infection is common, affecting around 90 per cent of adults globally. However, it is almost universal in people with MS.

A landmark study in 2022 provided the strongest evidence yet that infection with EBV is necessary to develop MS. Among 10 million US military personnel monitored over many years, MS only developed in those who had been infected with EBV. Signs of nerve damage appeared several years prior to MS onset, but only after EBV infection.

In MS, the immune system mistakenly attacks the insulating layer of myelin that surrounds nerve cells in the brain, spinal cord and optic nerve. There are several theories on the role of EBV in the development of MS. One theory suggests that the body's immune attack against EBV also mistakenly targets the brain and spinal cord.

It is not clear yet whether EBV simply acts as an initial trigger for MS, or whether it continues to drive disease activity following the onset of MS.

However, a growing body of evidence suggests that chronic EBV infection of B cells, a type of immune cell, might be a driver of chronic symptoms in MS, such as fatigue.

Why trial antivirals for EBV in MS?

In Australia and globally, scientists are investigating various strategies to target EBV in MS. These include antiviral medications, vaccines, and cell therapies.

Antiviral drugs work by preventing viruses from making more copies of themselves (replicating). However, they don't completely eliminate the virus from the body.

If EBV is driving ongoing disease activity in MS, the hope is that using antivirals to stop EBV replicating might help suppress MS activity.

Why repurpose drugs for MS?

The development of new drugs is an expensive process with long lead times.

An alternative strategy is to "repurpose" existing drugs. That is, to take drugs that are already approved for other uses and test them for effectiveness in a new condition.

This can bring new therapies to the clinic much more quickly, because much of the safety testing has already been done, and there is often a better understanding of the drug's target effects and side effects.

Aspirin is one example of a drug that has been repurposed, where itz can be used as a treatment for pain and inflammation, as well as cardiovascular disorders.

Despite EBV being such a common virus, there are currently no approved antiviral treatments for EBV infection in Australia.

However, antivirals used to treat other viruses are known to suppress EBV activity, both in the laboratory and in human clinical trials, offering hope.

Read the full article.

Building the perfect support system after diagnosis: Sonya's story

'I was linked in with my MS Nurse not long after diagnosis, she outlined all the services that were available to me,' Sonya says.

'I would often chat to the nurses to gain a better understanding when I was trying to make decisions around treatments.'

At the end of 2019 Sonya went for a long bushwalk with her family at Valentine's Peak in Tasmania. It was after that hike that Sonya first began experiencing symptoms of MS.

'It was this very intense hike and climb. It took us about eight hours and I just didn't recover after that. The inflammation I had was right through my body. I just thought it was part of getting older and just sort of brushed it off.

'But after this bushwalk, I ached and hurt and just couldn't get this inflammation under control. I ended up with pressure in my eye which I didn't know at the time was optic neuritis.'

Adjusting to a new way of life was challenging, not just for Sonya but also for some of her loved ones.

'Even for my mum, I know for her this diagnosis was really hard. It's just me and mum, so it was difficult for her, but she has been so pleased to see the support network that MS Plus provides.

'I might be nearly 50 but I'm still her daughter and it makes her more comfortable to know that I have good care and support.'

After her diagnosis, Sonya began accessing therapeutic support to continue to live well.

'One of the best pieces of advice I got from an MS Nurse was when I was struggling with selecting the right treatment. The nurse said to me, "you're about to go into a race and you don't know what car the other person is driving, so what car do you want to pick?" When I looked at it that way my decision suddenly became a lot easier.

'You want to try and stay ahead of your MS and that was a great way to explain it to someone. That was early on and stuck with me for so long. MS nurses don't pass any judgement they just explain your options,' Sonya says.

'I had this handful of brochures from my neurologist and that's when I cried because all the options terrified me. I would never have picked the treatment I did based on the brochures, without the guidance I received from my MS Nurse.'

Sonya continues to manage her symptoms through a combination of supports.

'I am connected with physiotherapists, who I see regularly. This has really helped me to get my strength back in my right leg to the point where I can lift it right up, which I wasn't able to. Working with the physio has been life changing.

'I later realised I also have lymphedema in both legs, so my lymphatic system isn't working like it should. But because I've got that background with MS and working with physios, I'm better able to manage this other condition, understanding how the two conditions interact and can be managed.

'I think I've always been resilient, but I didn't realise how resilient. My approach with MS is, I try to think of it as something I must keep in a box. Sometimes it gets out and it's okay to have a bad day, but you've got to keep resetting and moving forward. I try and visualise it. I might need to adapt but it doesn't stop me from doing what I want to do.'

Sonya recently purchased an ebike, to help her go on long rides with her son along the coast.

'It's like with my bike, I'm going to need an engine to get me up the hill, with gardening I now have raised garden beds. Being more adaptive because of my MS flows through to the work I do as well and all areas of my life.'

MS mythbuster

Myth: Only older people with MS experience continence issues

Reality: Bladder and bowel issues are common in MS, regardless of age or stage. It's not just about getting older, other factors like MS progression, health and lifestyle matter too.

The Plus Continence service can help you to manage your symptoms and improve your quality of life. Head to **msplus.org.au/pluscontinence**

> **"Incontinence involves bladder and bowel dysfunction. Early detection through education and self-awareness is essential, especially for people living with MS. Understanding the impact of incontinence can also help individuals improve bladder and bowel health.**
>
> **Cathryn, MS Plus Continence Nurse**

Education

Upcoming employment support sessions, new sessions added each month, FREE, live online:

Working with a chronic condition: tips to staying employed

Wednesday 9 April, 6:00pm–7:30pm

Join our employment experts who will share practical advice to help you navigate the challenges of work while managing a chronic condition. there are many benefits to remaining in employment beyond the financial benefits.

Learn strategies for maintaining your career while managing your condition to help you stay working.

To register for an upcoming session, visit **msplus.org.au/education**

Q: Can I get help with household tasks?

A: Yes! If household tasks are included in your NDIS plan under Support Category 1 [Assistance with Daily Living].

This can help to cover cleaning, laundry, grocery shopping and gardening. If it's not specifically included, you may still be able to access support through your core funding to assists with tasks around the home.

If you're feeling overwhelmed with the latest NDIS changes, our support coordinators and plan management services can help.

Get in touch today, phone 1800 042 138, email **connect@msplus.org.au** or visit **msplus.org.au/support-services/ndis-services**

Diet tips and tricks

Gut health fun facts

Did you know?

- **Your gut is a key player in your mood: the gut produces around 95% of the body's serotonin, the "feel-good" neurotransmitter.**
- So, gut health is directly tied to your mental health, potentially influencing mood disorders like anxiety and depression.
- Fermented foods are gut friendly: probiotic foods like kefir and yoghurts with active and live cultures (good bacteria) can also support a healthy gut.
- Gut health impacts immune function: about 70-80% of your immune system is housed in your gut.
- A healthy gut plays a major role in protecting you from infections and autoimmune diseases.
- Diverse diet = diverse microbiome: eating a wide variety of plant-based foods (fruits, vegetables, whole grains) helps promote a diverse microbiome. A diverse gut microbiome is linked to better digestion, immunity, and even a lower risk of chronic diseases.

Symptom spotlight

Swallowing difficulties

Weakness and lack of coordination in the muscles of the neck, mouth, cheeks and throat can interrupt the complex process of swallowing.

The messages in the brain that trigger the swallowing response can also be affected in MS. As a result, MS can cause dysphagia (difficulty swallowing).

What should you do if you experience swallowing problems?

If you're having difficulty swallowing, talk to your GP, MS nurse or neurologist. They can give you advice and may refer you to an allied health specialist, such as a speech pathologist.

How to swallow safely

- Take your time when eating — take smaller bites and concentrate on chewing and swallowing.
- Sip on drinks slowly throughout your meal and if you have any food lodged in your throat.
- Eat smaller meals more often or have your largest meal when you have the most energy.

- Use good posture while you sit to make it easier to swallow.
- Be aware of foods that are harder to eat and may cause swallowing issues, such as dry food, crumbly textures or thin liquids that go down quickly.
- Relax and avoid speaking while you eat.
- Stay upright for at least 20 minutes after eating.
- Make sure your mouth is empty before continuing to eat or drink.
- If you are having difficulties swallowing, don't hesitate to seek further care from a medical professional, as choking can be life threatening. In case of an emergency call 000.

Find out more **msplus.org.au/swallowingandspeech**

MS PLUS
Healthy Ageing

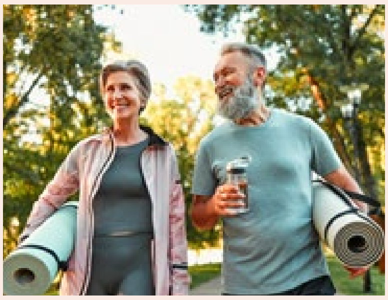
Over 65 and live with a neurological condition?

We understand you may need additional supports to help you to live well. We can tailor our care to your unique needs. Contact our Healthy Ageing team today!

☎ 1800 042 138
✉ connect@msplus.org.au
🌐 **msplus.org.au/HealthyAgeing**

Active & well over 65

Three week program starting Tuesday 6 May (6, 13 and 20 May), 10:00am–11:30am, refreshments provided



Brain health is as important as physical wellbeing. Join our Active & Well over 65 program and learn about how you can improve both your brain and physical health, explore practical tips to enhance wellbeing, and build connections with like minded peers. Health professionals will join you each week to give you tips and answer questions. Register now.

Peer Support NSW

New over 65s Peer Support Group now meeting at Lidcombe Wellbeing Centre

This is a great chance to meet and connect with others living with MS and other neurological conditions at our amazing new Lidcombe Wellbeing Centre!

The group will meet on the last Tuesday of every month from 10:30am–12:30pm, 80 Betty Cuthbert Drive, Lidcombe.

A great opportunity to check out the new centre and connect with other MS Plus support services while you're there!

Want to improve your balance and coordination, reduce your risk of falls and improve your overall mobility?

Reach out for a chat with a Physiotherapist today.

☎ 1800 042 138
✉ connect@msplus.org.au
🌐 **msplus.org.au/plusphysio**

What's On

Register for an upcoming program today at msplus.org.au/programs

Upcoming Programs

MS Plus Navigate Series: Family & Friends

Over two 75-minute sessions, an MS expert will guide discussions, provide information, links to resources and answer any questions you may have.

The sessions will be facilitated by an MS Nurse and cover topics such as understanding MS, navigating the health system, where to access support and how to look after yourself while supporting someone else.

Dates:
Various dates available.

Navigate Series: Newly Diagnosed

The online 90-minute sessions run weekly over five weeks. Each session will include expert content, an opportunity to learn from others experiences and a chance to ask questions.

The sessions will be facilitated by our nurse advisor team.

Dates:
Various dates available.

Upskill NDIS

Upskill NDIS provides you with an overview of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), so that you can be more confident in your decision to apply.

Our team has supported people throughout their NDIS access journey since 2016. They bring extensive experience and expertise of the ever-changing NDIS landscape.

This 40-minute online lunchtime session will cover:

- who and what is the NDIA and NDIS?
- explanation of common terminology
- what is a diagnosis vs disability?
- what evidence is required when you apply?

Dates:
FREE day and evening sessions are available throughout the year.

FACETS
Fatigue management for MS

6 x 90 minute weekly sessions.

Whether you're trying to keep up with the kids, ease fatigue at work or want to get more out of your day, FACETS provides practical strategies and approaches. Participants must be MS Plus clients (free registration), have a MS diagnosis and a minimum level of mobility.

Exercise Groups

NSW

To book, phone Plus Connect **1800 042 138**

Plus Boxing
Fridays 9am–10:30am
80 Betty Cuthbert Dr, Lidcombe

Lidcombe Yoga (Chair based)
Wednesdays 10:15am
80 Betty Cuthbert Dr, Lidcombe

Dance for Health (independent and chair based)
Mondays 10:30am
80 Betty Cuthbert Dr, Lidcombe

Marrickville Yoga (independent)
Tuesdays 9:00am
Addison Road Community Centre,
142 Addison Road, Marrickville

ACT

To book, phone
1800 042 138

Be better balanced
Tuesdays 9:30am
(circuit-based class)
Thursdays 10am
(chair-based class)
Gloria McKerrow House
117 Denison St, Deakin

Cost: $13 per session: min purchase of 10 session class pass for $130

Wheels in motion (chair-based class)
Thursdays 11:00am
Gloria McKerrow House,
117 Denison St, Deakin

Cost: $13 per session, min purchase of 10 session class pass for $130

VIC

For queries relating to exercise groups in Blackburn, please call Plus Connect **1800 042 138**

MS PLUS
Neuro Wellbeing

Services to support and improve your quality of life

- improve balance / reduce falls risk
- fatigue management
- weakness / spasticity
- improved bowel and bladder health
- supported healthy ageing
- optimal nutrition

Maintain an active lifestyle with the help of our Physiotherapists, Exercise Physiologists, Dietitians, Occupational Therapists and Continence Nurses

Book your first appointment today!

Freecall 1800 042 138
connect@msplus.org.au
msplus.org.au