

About the book

When he is too tired to take him to the big match, Jack's dad explains that this is because he has multiple sclerosis (MS). By talking to his dad and his mum, Jack comes to understand what this might mean.

This book provides an introduction to some of the issues and concerns that young children might have when they discover that their father has MS.

'As someone who has had to cope with a parent with MS, I'd like to recommend this book to any child who is going through a similar experience.'

J K Rowling

About the Authors

Gary Hetherington

Gary, who comes from Liverpool, but now lives in the Wirral, found out that he had multiple sclerosis about 3 years ago. Gary has been married to Jane for eight years and they have a beautiful daughter called Olivia.

Gary was a mechanical engineer until two years ago, when he was forced to change direction because of the symptoms of MS. He is now concentrating on web design.

Carolyn Young

Like Gary, Carolyn is a proud parent. She is married to Alun and they have three children.

Carolyn is a doctor who works as a specialist in a hospital helping people who are having problems because nerves in the body are not working as they should. Her special interest is working with people who have multiple sclerosis.

My Dad's got MS

by Gary Hetherington and Carolyn Young



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Jack woke up one beautiful Saturday morning feeling happy. It was the day of the big match. Jack would have been going to see his favourite football team play their local rivals, if his Dad wasn't tired so often.

Jack opened his curtains, which were covered with the goal heroes of last season, and looked out at the lovely, sunny day. He ran downstairs, two at a time. "Dad, Dad, Dad, it's the big match today. We can go in the garden and have a game, come on!"

"Dad!" he called again.

"Jack, your Dad's still in bed, he's a bit tired," said Mum.





“It’s not fair, he’s always lying in bed, and he promised me we could play football this morning before we go to watch the match at David’s.” David’s family had satellite television!

“I know, darling, Dad’s not feeling too good at the moment, but that’s not to say he won’t be better tomorrow.” That was all Jack seemed to hear these days. It seemed as though his dad was always tired or unwell.

“Mum, can I phone David? He’ll play football with me,” said Jack.

“Of course you can, but make sure that you are back for lunch.”

“Yes, I will. See you later, Mum,” Jack replied.

But it wasn’t the same playing football without his dad.



After lunch, on the way to David's house to watch the match, Jack asked his father why he was always so tired. His father said that he had an 'osis'.

"What's an 'osis'?" said Jack. "Is it magic?"

"Not exactly, Jack, although it does have invisible symptoms," Dad replied.

"Wow! Wizards are magic, Dad, and do you know what? When they use their magic powers, they get tired as well. It's in all of the books you know."

Dad told Jack that his tiredness was caused by something called MS. Sometimes the MS made him feel a bit wobbly, sometimes a bit tired or dizzy and sometimes a bit grumpy.

His father also told Jack that people with MS were affected in different ways. The way your MS felt might change with time. It could start in your eyes, or with weakness in your legs. Then your legs might get better but later perhaps your eyes or your hands would play up.





During the match, the only thing on everyone's mind was the football and how exciting it was. All too soon, the final whistle blew. Their team had won. They all cheered and Jack jumped around the room. Jack had never seen his Dad so happy.

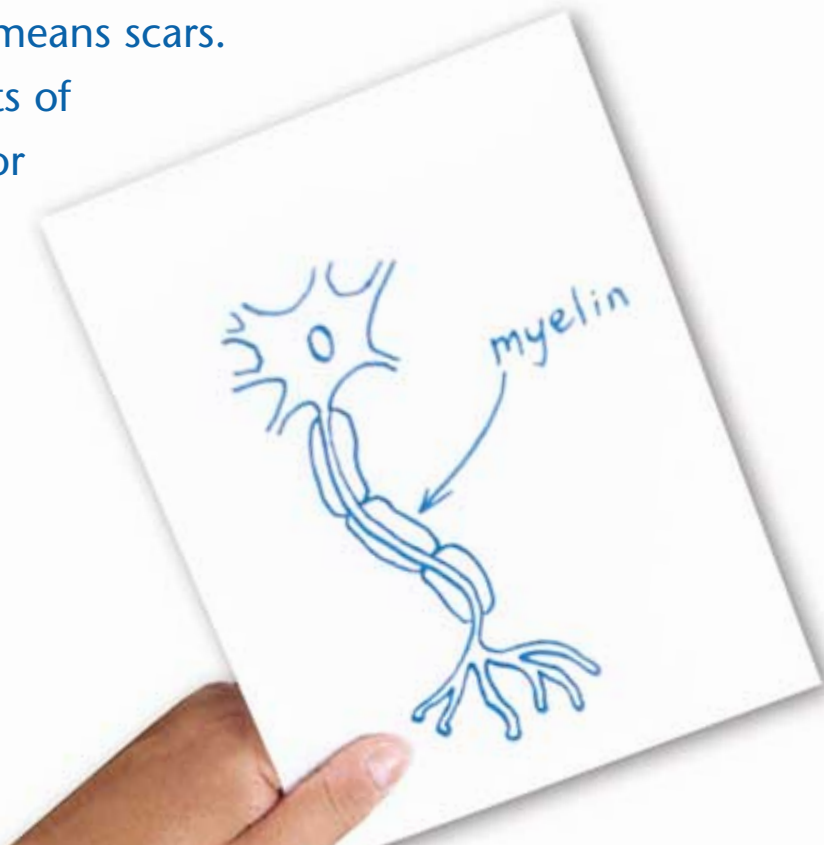
When Jack had calmed down again, he said, "Dad, what does MS stand for?"

"Well, the full name is multiple sclerosis. That is why I said I have an 'osis'," said Dad. "There are different types of MS and it can affect different people in many different ways. For some people, like me, the problems come and go, which is why I'm tired some days and not others. Some people with MS use a wheelchair because their legs may not work as they used to," said Dad.



Dad explained that MS is something that some people have because the nerves in their body are damaged and not working properly. "Normally, messages from the brain pass very quickly along the nerves to different parts of the body, telling them what to do. You don't even have to think about it."

Dad drew Jack a picture to show him what a nerve looks like. He explained that nerves have a special covering on them called 'myelin'. "When this cover gets damaged, you get a scar. The word multiple means 'lots' and the word 'sclerosis' means scars. So multiple sclerosis means lots of scars. These scars slow down or stop messages from the brain getting through."





“Jack, at school you are quite good at running, aren’t you?”

“Yes,” said Jack, not knowing what was coming next.

“Imagine then, that one of your teachers put the hurdles on the running field just as you were about to run.” Jack said that they would slow him down, or even not allow him to finish the race. His father said that that is what these scars did to messages going down the nerves.

Dad also told Jack that he was very sorry about being grumpy sometimes, but that he hoped that the medicine the doctors were giving him had made him less grumpy. Jack gave him ‘that’ look. It made him laugh. They both laughed!

Dad drove them home after the game, and said, “You know, Jack, MS doesn’t always stop me from doing things, like driving.” This made Jack feel better because if his Dad had MS, he didn’t seem too worried about it.



Later, when they were back at home, Jack asked his Mum if she knew about Dad's MS.

"Yes, of course I do, Jack. Dad and I have talked about it a lot and we decided that the time was right to explain it to you. How do you feel about it?"

Jack told his Mum that he was a bit worried because if Dad had this illness, then somebody else in the family could catch it. Mum said, "Jack, you have nothing to worry about. MS isn't like having a cold, you can't pass it onto someone else. It's not that type of illness."

What a funny old day Jack was having – first the football win, then his Dad telling him about his MS. What else could happen?

"Jack, can you come in here, please?" said Dad from the lounge where he was sitting in front of a brand new television set.

"What's this, Dad?" said Jack, looking surprised.





“What do you think of this – our new satellite television?” he replied. “This means we can watch the football live whenever it is on television.”

“Dad, that’s great! And it also means that I don’t have to listen to David on Monday mornings telling everyone how great the game was on his new television.” Jack was pleased.

Dad was smiling when he said, “Jack could you pass the instructions to me? I think that they’re in that envelope on the coffee table.”

Jack got the envelope and opened it for his father. They were not instructions for the television, but tickets for the next match!



“But I thought you weren’t well enough to go to the football!” said Jack.

“That’s MS for you, you don’t know from one week to the next how you are going to feel.” Dad told Jack that over the last few days he had started to feel better, and he hoped that by next week he would be OK.

“Dad, that’s great news. You are the best dad in the whole world. I can’t wait to tell my friends about the new TV.” Jack asked if he could phone David.

Whilst Jack was dialling David’s number, Dad shouted through to him, “If this MS of mine means we can’t go to the match, then we can always watch it live from our own house.”

This ended up being a great day. One of the best ever!



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