

5 top tips for taking care of your mental health

I'm Hayley and I'm a clinical psychologist working at Great Ormond Street Hospital. When you're diagnosed with MS it's completely normal to experience a wide range of emotions. You might find yourself feeling sad, angry, frustrated, worried or anxious, or perhaps feeling relieved that you now have a name and an explanation for what you've been experiencing. Any of these emotions are completely normal and it's okay to feel whatever you're feeling. But here are some tips, some coping strategies, that you might find helpful.

Tip 1 Think about who you can talk to about your diagnosis and about how you're feeling.

Remember emotions are completely normal and we'll all experience those feelings at times when we experience challenging situations, but it can still be really helpful to talk to the people around you. So think about who it would be helpful to share how you're feeling with, whether that's family or friends. It may not be that you want to talk about it with everyone but think about who those supports can be.

Tip 2 Try and carry on with the things that matter to you in life outside of your condition.

You might find that you now have more appointments to go to and that there are reasons that MS is having an impact on your day-to-day life, but it's really important, if you can, to keep going with things like seeing friends, other activities you normally enjoy and being at school. MS is only one of the things about you, there are a number of other things that are part of your life too and you need to, if you can, find ways to continue with those things even at this time.

Tip 3 Take some time to look after yourself.

This is something that we all need to do. We're not necessarily very good at making time to do it. This can include a range of things, so physically that might be things like making sure you get enough to eat, getting enough sleep and it might also be things like making sure you set aside some time to relax or do something you enjoy after a difficult or a demanding day.

Tip 4 Learn about your condition and about MS.

It can be quite confusing at first and you shouldn't expect to remember everything that you're told in your appointments. But think about the way that you'll find most helpful to learn about that, the condition. It might be that that's talking to your MS team or to your family or other people who can help you to learn a bit more. It might be looking at websites or leaflets and for some people it might be hearing about other people's experiences of MS. There are different ways you can do that, so speak to your team or make contact with organisations like the MS Trust. Not everybody will choose to do that and that's absolutely fine too.

Tip 5 If you do find that you're feeling very down, anxious or angry or that those feelings are around a lot of the time and they're getting in the way of doing the things

that you want to be doing, then talk to somebody because there are lots of people who can help with how you're feeling. Talk to your MS team or your GP. These are the sorts of difficulties that lots of people need help with at some point in their lives, particularly at times where they might have something challenging going on like a new diagnosis. The professionals will be able to point you in the right direction of the people who can help you by talking about this.