



National
Multiple Sclerosis
Society
Upstate New York
Chapter

“Try on MS” Toolkit An Awareness and Educational Activity

Since many of the symptoms of multiple sclerosis are “invisible,” people may not understand the disease. Through “Try on MS,” volunteers use everyday props to help community members learn more about MS.

Where to use the “Try on MS” toolkit:

- Walk MS or Bike MS: promote events and recruit members for your team
- Community fundraising event
- Team wrap-around events
- MS Awareness Week
- Health fairs
- At a local mall or community center (be sure to contact the organization ahead of time to receive permission)

For most venues, a team of 2-3 volunteers is all that is needed:

- Moderator (preferably a person living with MS)
- Greeter(s)— (1 or 2 people)
- Optional: Booth (1 or 2 people)—basic materials and publications are available from the Chapter

Props: (most are easy to find at local thrift shops or home improvement store)

- High heels (foot drop)
- Flippers (balance)
- Wide belt or leg brace (spasticity)
- Thick rubber gloves and button shirt (numbness)
- Sun or Safety Glasses with scratched lenses (vision problems)
- Thick foam cushion (dizziness/vertigo)
- Leg and/or arm weights (fatigue)

Be sure to introduce yourself to your “audience” and use a leading question or statement to provoke interest in the information you are sharing. For example, you may start a mini-presentation or conversation with the following:

- “Are you familiar with MS?”
- “Have you heard of multiple sclerosis?”
- “We’re volunteers with the National MS Society and we’re here today to spread awareness about multiple sclerosis.”
- “We’d like to invite you to learn a bit about MS and even experience some of the symptoms first hand.”

Use props to demonstrate symptoms and be sure to explain what the props represent:

“Today we want to give you the opportunity to ‘Try on MS.’”

- Foot drop: (high heels) “Sometimes people with MS have difficulty lifting or flexing their foot, and this can greatly affect the way they walk.”
- Balance: (flippers) “People with MS can experience difficulties with balance, resulting in a swaying or ‘drunken’ type of walk.”
- Spasticity: (belt or leg brace) “people with MS can experience muscle tightness and stiffness called ‘spasticity’. With spasticity a person can experience muscle spasms or sudden muscle movements.”
- Numbness: (kitchen gloves while buttoning shirt) “Numbness of face, body, arms and legs is one of the most common symptoms of MS.”
- Vision Problems: (blotchy, blurry glasses) “Vision problems are common in people with MS and can cause blurring, blindness in one eye or dark spots in vision.”
- Dizziness/Vertigo: (cushions) “People with MS may feel off balance or lightheaded, affecting their equilibrium and ability to feel ‘grounded’.
- Fatigue: (leg/arm weights) “Fatigue is one of the most common symptoms of MS, occurring in about 80% of people.”

Questions to ask:

- What does it feel like?
- Can you imagine living with this symptom?
- What advice would you give to a person experiencing this symptom?

About the National MS Society, Upstate New York Chapter: The Chapter is nationally recognized as a leader in providing comprehensive service programs for over 12,400 people with MS and their families in 50 counties. Our mission is to mobilize people and resources to drive research for a cure and to address the challenges of everyone affected by MS. We do this by providing programs and services to people living with MS and their families and by educating the general public and community leaders by disseminating reliable information.

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