



**MS Learn Online  
Feature Presentation  
Healthy Living MS: Emotional Health  
Special Guest: Clay Walker**

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**Kate:** Hi everyone, welcome to MS Learn Online. I'm Kate Milliken your host for the second program in a special three-part series on living well with MS, featuring multi-platinum country music star, Clay Walker.

(Applause)

In the first program we talked about what we can do to maintain our physical health while living with MS. Now we're going to talk about another aspect of our health that is so important when living with the uncertainties of MS ... our emotional well-being.

Joining us in our discussion is Dr. Rosalind Kalb, a clinical psychologist and the Vice President for the National MS Society's Professional Resource Center.

We'll start this program with a quote from Dr. Kalb about emotional health:

“Since everyone’s MS is different, there are no predetermined stages of adjustment and no right or wrong ways to feel about it. However, there are some very common reactions most people will experience at one time or another over the course of the disease.”

Let's take a look at what Clay Walker does to manage his emotional health.

**Clay:** I think the emotional part of MS has been the hardest, or was the hardest for me to overcome because I didn't know what the disease was going to do to my body. Once I was able to manage it with a daily injection and physical exercise, I think that my emotional, emotions eased and I feel very comfortable in my own skin.

For me I simplify things with three components, mind, body and spirit. I try to take care of my mind through knowing that I'm going to be okay, My body, as I said I try to exercise quite a bit and for my spirit. I'm a prayerful person and I have a lot of faith. I believe that if you take care of those three components, then the rest of it is just gravy.

I would say that, that my family, like most people is the most important thing to me. And , when I see them smiling and I can go laugh, and run and play with them. I don't think they look at me, dad has MS, or my husband has MS, By taking care of myself, I feel like I'm taking care of my family, and there's no greater feeling then that.

**Kate:** So Dr, Kalb let's start with, from your experience, what are some common reaction you've had from people who are newly diagnosed?

**Dr. Kalb:** I think the most common one that I've seen is shock and disbelief. I think nobody expects this kind of thing to happen in their lives, so that's certainly a part of it. Particularly when symptoms come and change your life in the way your body feels and disappear there's a feeling of disbelief. It has to be wrong I'm sure the doctor made a mistake, this can't be happening to me. And I think for a lot of people there's also a real fear panic about what's going to happen.

**Kate:** How would you say these emotions change over time?

**Dr. Kalb:** I think the most important thing about the feelings people have is that they ebb and flow as the disease does it thing. So in no particular order and in no particular way the kinds of things most commonly are grief because this is a disease that can be characterized by a lot of change and loss people have to get used to their bodies working differently or their

minds working differently then it and every time the disease changes, your sense of you are and how you are able to do things, there's a loss that has to be grieved over. I think grieving is a big part of this. And it goes on and on. I think anxiety is also big part of this because we don't like things to be unpredictable. And as everybody knows unpredictability is a real hallmark of MS, you don't know what's gonna happen next or what your body is going to feel from one day to the next. It's hard to plan so that kind of anxiety, am I gonna make to work today am I gonna make it to my kids soccer game am I going to make it to the bathroom on time, those are things that make people feel anxious. And when things are unpredictable, I think people get angry.

**Kate:** Clay I would love to start to ask you what your original reaction was initially diagnosed. I doubt you laughing at the point, and how you've changed over time.

**Clay:** I wasn't laughing, I can tell you, I don't think you want to hear my sad story because we all have them, I rather talk about what I did to make my emotions become better and more stable. If you have things, not just people, things, what are you a slave to, what are the things that make you unhappy, I think you have to look at the emotional side of things. I think we bring our emotions, bring it to us, we call it to us. And I just started changing these patterns that I thought felt like were unhealthy. I remember at the time I was diagnosed that I was overwhelmed with the music business. My career was going gangbusters, just started to just skyrocket and I thought how do I really want to look at this, is this taking everything away from me, is this what's happening. And I didn't look at it that way. I looked at it as a balance in life. You know, you can be too high to and then you can be too low, I felt like MS really balanced me out.

**Kate:** I think that in other experiences, that people when they're diagnosed get really low, so I'd love to ask the question to you Dr. Kalb, when is there when does somebody know that when they're feeling really low and depressed, that maybe its outside the realm of just having a first reaction to a diagnosis and they need to get help.

**Dr. Kalb:** I think it's a really important question because that sadness and grieving that is a normal part of dealing with some of the losses that MS can cause is different than actually being very down or depressed. We know that depression is really common in MS, it's part of the disease and a reaction to it so it's important for people to be alert to feeling down every day all day long for a couple weeks three weeks at a time, because that's not just a passing feeling blue, that's a signal that something more important, more serious is going on. We really encourage people if they have those down moods don't lift. They're really down, cranky irritable for days, they really need to...

**Clay:** I went in to what I call a cave and I think that reaction is a very natural one and a healthy one, staying in the cave is what's dangerous. If I could be so brave to ask Barry who's sitting in our audience, Barry's been diagnosed for about a year now. What was your biggest fear when you were diagnosed and where are you now a year later? Are you getting better, emotionally incapacitated, how are you?

**Barry:** I think the biggest thing is, like you is the unknown.

**Clay:** What was your biggest fear? When you first heard the words, obviously you probably didn't know what the disease was but what was your biggest fear during those first few days?

**Barry:** The biggest fear exactly, I've riding the MS bike and stuff but didn't really know what it was. And I think that's the way most people are. But when you hear you think "oh no" I'm not going to be able to walk in 5 years or 10 years or do the things that you want or have a family that you want

**Kate:** I think it also just, just to add to it. Even if it's your first year like Barry, I think everybody deals with the fear of the unknown no matter how far they're in the disease, and frankly in many situations, I think it gets worse over time. So I think it's a hard situation for everyone. Here's an email from John. I didn't know what MS was when I was diagnosed, how about you? Did you know what it was?

**Clay:** I did not. I thought it was muscular dystrophy, I really did, I thought I was gonna be one of Jerry's kids.

**Kate:** Right. Let's go to the studio audience. Jody, Hi. You got the microphone back, good job.

**Jody:** Hi Clay. Thank you very much for every thing you do for us, you pretty much already answered this but, what was you're number one fear that you had when you were first told you had MS?

**Clay:** My worst fear was that I could not walk my daughter down the aisle. She was 6 months old, I'm looking at her and I'm going, this is my first child. And I can tell you 13 years later, I'm gonna be walking down the aisle.

**Kate:** Dr. Kalb, overall what are some things people can do to maintain a good sense of emotional health?

**Dr. Kalb:** I think it's important to recognize the feeling you're having, get the support you need, whether it's from family members, friends, support groups. If you're feeling down and not feeling better as it should periodically its time to reach out and get some help from a professional. I think also its finding things in your life, even if you have to do them differently then you did them before or change some of your goals, find things that excite you, that give you satisfaction, that give you enjoyment you don't want MS to be your whole life, it has to be a piece of your life. We don't know how to make it go away yet but it doesn't have to be your whole life. And if you feel it starts to take more space than it really deserves, it's time to reach, tap resources start to refocus so you can get on with those other things in your life that are important.

**Clay:** So you can't underestimate happiness, in layman terms.

**Kate:** That's true. Thank you, Clay Walker, for your willingness to be so open and candid with us about these very personal issues. And thank you, Roz Kalb, for your wonderful insight.

And thanks to our fantastic studio audience, and to all of you who e-mailed your questions.

And finally, a special thanks goes to Teva Neuroscience for their charitable contribution which has made this special presentation of *MS Learn Online* possible.

Remember that this is the second of a three part series. So if you haven't seen the first segment dealing with physical health, or the third dealing with fitting MS into your daily lives, click on the titles to the right of the screen. We'll see you then.