

BEATING MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Empowering Stories of Self-Healing and Thriving

AGOTA NAWROTH
& PAIGE NEWSOME

Copyright © 2023 by Agota Nawroth

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

ISBN: 979-8-218-27971-4

Neither the publisher nor the author is engaged in rendering professional advice or services to the individual reader. The ideas, procedures, and suggestions contained in this book are not intended as a substitute for consulting with your physician. All matters regarding your health require medical supervision. Neither the author nor the publisher shall be liable or responsible for any loss or damage allegedly arising from any information or suggestion in this book.

While the author has made every effort to provide accurate telephone numbers, Internet addresses, and other contact information at the time of publication, neither the publisher nor the author assumes any responsibility for errors, or for changes that occur after publication. Further, the publisher does not have any control over and does not assume any responsibility for author or third-party websites or their content.

To my loved ones,

This book reveals the transformative path of my MS journey and daily dedication required for a healthy life. I'm taking care of myself, so you don't have to.

To the multiple sclerosis community,

May our stories empower and inspire, fostering understanding, compassion, and progress. Together, let's navigate the challenges of this journey, knowing that we are never alone.

With love and deepest admiration,
Agota Nawroth

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my deepest gratitude and appreciation to everyone who has contributed to the creation and completion of this book.

First and foremost, I extend my heartfelt thanks to Paige Newsome. Without you, this book wouldn't exist. Your belief in this project, constant motivation, and endless hours of work have been a driving force. You shaped this book in ways I couldn't have imagined.

I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to all the remarkable individuals who graciously shared their heartbreaking stories for this book. Your bravery in opening up about your journeys will undoubtedly resonate with others who find solace and strength in knowing they are not alone. I am honored to have had the opportunity to give voice to your stories and express my deepest appreciation for your invaluable contribution.

Lastly, I extend my gratitude to my followers, readers, and supporters. Your enthusiasm, feedback, and reviews inspire me to continue sharing my story and the knowledge I've acquired along the way with the world, raising awareness about diseases that can be prevented.

To all those mentioned above and the countless others who have contributed in various ways, your presence in my life has made this book a reality. Thank you for being a part of this remarkable journey.

With heartfelt appreciation,
Agota Nawroth

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Many individuals are searching for a diagnosis while struggling with various symptoms. For those of us already diagnosed, having answers can be a relief but also adds a lifelong burden. At times, this weight can feel overwhelming. I wish a book like this had been available when I was first diagnosed four years ago. It would have made a world of difference. Back then, I wouldn't have felt so alone and lost. I wouldn't have had to search through numerous books to connect the dots. My goal with this book is to provide you answers and give you practical guidance to regain control and steer your life back on track.

The stories in this book showcase the remarkable potential within us as human beings. We can heal our minds and bodies, making full recoveries from autoimmune diseases when we cultivate the right mindset and well-being practices. I haven't encountered anyone who thrives with a pessimistic outlook. Our minds are incredibly powerful. It's crucial to remember that the path to healing often begins there. While change can be a challenge, it's a necessary step for those seeking a healthier life.

So, who is this book for? It's not exclusively for people with MS. This book is filled with ideas to improve the lives of anyone, diagnosed or not, who is facing symptoms. Each chapter is a glimpse into someone's life, flourishing despite the diagnosis. My hope is that you'll discover a story or two that resonate with you. Please share this book, help us spread the message, and raise awareness about this complex condition. It doesn't have to lead to life in a wheelchair.

CONTENTS

Disclaimer

1	Agota N. - Diagnosed in 2019	1
2	Paige N. - Diagnosed in 2019	28
3	Katy - Diagnosed in 2020	44
4	Angie G. - Diagnosed in 2004	56
5	Elisa F. - Diagnosed in 2011	65
6	Kelly G. - Diagnosed in 2015	81
7	Bob C. - Diagnosed in 1999	89
8	Nassira - Diagnosed in 2018	100
9	Biljana - Diagnosed in 2013	107
10	Mohammed - Diagnosed in 2018	112
11	Kathryn - Diagnosed in 2018	117
12	Claudie - Diagnosed in 1996	120
13	Laila - Diagnosed in 2010	129
14	Adria H. - Diagnosed in 2020	133
15	Mara R. - Diagnosed in 2004	159
16	Kelly K. - Diagnosed in 2015	164
17	Michelle - Diagnosed in 1996	182
18	Joanne M. - Diagnosed in 2009	190
19	Helena K. - Diagnosed in 2000	205
20	Sam P. - Diagnosed in 2015	212

21	Alicia - Diagnosed in 2018	230
22	Dawnmarie D. - Diagnosed in 2012	240
23	Clare M. - Diagnosed in 2019	243
24	Sofia C. - Diagnosed in 2013	250
25	Andrea - Diagnosed in 2000	257
26	Meryl H. - Diagnosed in 1999	268
27	Conor K. - Diagnosed in 2003	274
28	Parmjit K. - Diagnosed in 2008	286
29	Kadesha R. - Diagnosed in 2012	298
30	Melody W. - Diagnosed in 2013	306
31	Lieza - Diagnosed in 2016	312
32	Jasmin D. - Diagnosed in 2008	321
33	Megan L. - Diagnosed in 2007	325
34	Gabriel - Diagnosed in 2018	339
35	Talia - Diagnosed in 2016	348
36	Alice S. - Diagnosed in 2007	357
37	Maria I. - Diagnosed in 2012	373

Final Note

“Wellness is the complete integration of body, mind, and spirit – the realization that everything we do, think, feel, and believe has an effect on our state of well-being.”

– *Greg Anderson*

DISCLAIMER

The stories shared in this book provide personal perspectives and experiences, reflecting individual accounts. These stories should not be construed as professional medical advice or recommendations.

The author and publisher have made reasonable efforts to ensure the accuracy and authenticity of the stories. However, due to the subjective nature of personal accounts and the uniqueness of each individual's circumstances, the stories may not apply to or accurately represent everyone's experiences. The information and opinions expressed in this book are not a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. It is essential to consult with a qualified healthcare professional before making any decisions or taking any actions based on the information or stories provided in this book.

The author and publisher are not liable for errors, omissions, or consequences, resulting from the use of the information or stories in this book, which are shared for informational purposes only and do not guarantee specific outcomes or results. Health conditions and treatments vary among individuals, and what worked for one person may not be suitable for another. Therefore, readers should exercise caution and use their discretion when interpreting and applying the information or stories presented.

The stories in this book do not serve as endorsements or advertisements for specific healthcare providers, products, or services. Any references made are solely for illustrative purposes and do not imply endorsement or recommendation. Readers are encouraged to consult with qualified healthcare professionals for personalized advice and guidance, regarding their health concerns. Reliance on the information or stories provided in this book is done at the reader's own risk.

By reading this book, you acknowledge and agree to the terms of this disclaimer.

3

Story by **KATY**

Diagnosed in 2020

Currently 35 years old

Lives in Chicago, Illinois, United States

Instagram: @katemay26

Hi! I'm Katy. Nice to "meet" you! I'm a thirty-five-year-old, busy mom of four from Chicagoland, and this is my story. I grew up in a small town in southern Illinois, the oldest of four kids. My mom was a stay-at-home mom while my dad made a living as a pastor. We spent countless hours digging outside in the dirt and playing Apple Derby with dad. We were really just dodging smashed pieces of apples from our apple tree that dad hit toward us with a baseball bat—don't knock it until you try it! There was never a lack of baked goods in our house growing up. In 2003, our family moved to northern Illinois, just northwest of Chicago. I met my husband, finished high school, started college, got married, and graduated college all within a span of four years. In 2011, we welcomed our first baby, Calvin. In 2013, Norah was born, followed quickly by Caroline in 2015. Nothing like cranking out all the big milestones, one after another!

My story really started on September 28th, 2017, with the birth of my fourth baby—an 8 lb.19 in. beautiful baby girl named Hattie Paige. Her delivery was normal. The beginning of my recovery was normal. Even adding a fourth baby into our crazy family was normal. Little did we know, what we knew as normal wasn't going to be normal much longer. I've never been a big fan of rides, but I didn't choose to ride this rollercoaster. It was starting, and I was on it—whether I liked it or not.

When Hattie was born, my other kids were six, four, and two. As you can imagine, I was no stranger to living in a permanent state of exhaustion. This wasn't my first experience with a newborn. I had already been through three deliveries and recoveries, three rounds of long days and sleepless nights, and three breastfeeding journeys. I knew what to expect. But as the days and weeks went on, I quickly learned that my expectations for this postpartum experience weren't going to be met in the same way.

A few months after Hattie was born, I started to feel some strange dizziness. Not necessarily like spinning or vertigo, but more so unbalanced. I noticed I reached for the wall more often as I walked for a safety net. I sat down throughout the day far more than I ever had in the previous six years of my mothering journey combined. I just felt “off”. After a few months of this feeling, I decided it was time to reach out to my midwife for a checkup. She checked my iron levels, which were normal, and assured me she didn't see anything alarming. She sent me on my way with the “prescription” to rest more (haha) and eat more calories to make up for those lost with breastfeeding. In the back of my mind, I think I knew this wasn't the answer, but I was willing to try it.

Thankfully, I lived in the same town as my parents. My mom took the midwife's advice and ran with it. She tucked me into bed at her house, watched my older kids while I napped during the day, brought the baby to me to nurse, along with plates and plates of food to bump up my calorie consumption. Remember those baked goods I mentioned earlier? I vividly recall a plate of warm blueberry muffins, slathered in butter. Even after I left my parents' house, my mom made sure I was eating and resting as much as possible.

After a few months of trying this new plan, I knew it wasn't working. The dizziness persisted, and it was time to reach out to my primary care doctor for more answers. She started by running all my labs. Within a week, she called to let me know my vitamin D levels were extremely low (not surprising, knowing what I know now). I was thrilled—a simple problem with an easily fixable answer. She prescribed a mega

dose of vitamin D, 50,00 IU per week, and said that should “fix the problem”. For a few months, I pretended it did. I so badly wanted the vitamin deficiency to be the problem, and the supplement to be the answer.

Unfortunately, it wasn't. I finally admitted to my husband that I wasn't really feeling better. The dizziness was lingering, and I just couldn't keep going with the way I was feeling. So, back to my primary care doctor I went. This time, she diagnosed me with an ear infection and prescribed an antibiotic—my poor gut! I left with another prescription and a prayer that this would be the answer. It became clear very quickly that it wasn't. By this time, new symptoms were slowly being added into the mix. Tingling, twitching, and numbness in my legs, along with bladder issues and extreme exhaustion were the most troubling, on top of the continued dizziness.

At the risk of sounding like a broken record, I went back to my primary care doctor. I didn't have any other options. When I went for my third visit, I remember sitting on her table in tears, trying to get her to understand how I was feeling—that I knew there was something wrong with my body. I had recently experienced a new symptom that seemed like it might be the key to solving the puzzle in her eyes. I struggled finding my footing in a dark room. Darkness made me feel very unbalanced, like I didn't know where my foot was in relation to the ground for my next step. This made nursing a baby in the middle of the night very difficult. When I shared this, her ears perked up. She thought she'd figured it out. I didn't even care what it was: I just wanted an answer. Vestibular migraine. An answer that came with no solution. I asked what it meant, what it looked like long-term, and what treatment was. It was a “wait and see” approach. Another “answer” with a dead-end fix. I left her office feeling so scared and alone.

It was clear at this point in the journey I was going to have to medically advocate for myself in ways I'd never done before. I'd heard others share how important it was to them and their families in countless stories, but never in my own life. Thankfully, I had a friend who worked for a functional neurologist, Dr. Matthew Imber. I reached out and asked if he worked with vestibular conditions. The answer was yes! We scheduled a phone consultation for early February 2020, two and a half years after the onset of symptoms. We were finally off to the races!

I remember the phone consultation like it was yesterday. I sat on the floor of my bedroom closet, hiding from the kids and the noise. My heart pounded as I waited for the phone to ring. What if he didn't understand?

What if he couldn't help me? What if there were no answers? I was prepared for that, but hopeful I would be met with a different outcome. From the beginning of the phone consultation, I could tell this was the start of something new.

Dr. Imber took the time to listen to all my symptoms together, not just a snippet here or there of what I'd been experiencing. He asked amazing questions about my balance—things no one else had ever considered, as far as I knew. I'd always used the term “dizzy”, but he described it as a catchall. He asked me to explain my sensations without using the word dizzy. As I did, he listened, continuing to ask detailed questions. Before we wrapped up the phone consultation, I remember him asking me, “Is there anything else that you feel like you need to tell me that might be helpful in understanding your story?” That's where I got a chance to be completely honest with him...and myself.

I'd been experiencing some weird twitching and tingling in my legs for a few months. Since it was dismissed by so many other people, I talked myself into believing it was nothing. It didn't deserve attention. Before the phone consultation with Dr. Imber, I prayed that if I was supposed to share that piece with him, that God would provide a clear open door, and I'd feel comfortable sharing it. When he asked me that last question, I saw the open door and decided to walk through it. I told him about the weird feelings and sensations I'd been experiencing, but I wasn't met with invalidation. Instead, he said how important it was that he knew this piece of the puzzle. It made sense to him, fitting into the grand scheme of things he was seeing. In that one moment, I felt so seen and so validated.

I scheduled my first in-person appointment with him while we were on the phone. On February 17, 2020, my husband and I made the hour-long drive to his office for a two-hour appointment. It was filled with neurological tests, eye exams, sensory tests, balance, and walking. I did so many strange things in those two hours. I didn't understand how we were going to make any progress, but since this was my only option, I (mostly) trusted the process. We followed up a few weeks later. He showed me a “brain map” and had marked the areas of my brain showing weakness. We immediately started neurotherapy to work on strengthening those areas. Neurotherapy is a drug-free treatment that uses real-time displays of brain activity to help improve brain function.

It felt like we were finally moving in the right direction. Even without an actual diagnosis, someone listened and took me seriously. I believe that finally having that also gave me the internal motivation to do what I needed to feel better. Despite COVID, I continued to see him weekly for

neurotherapy, which made a huge difference in how I felt. But the biggest noticeable difference came as I implemented dietary changes.

At Dr. Imber's recommendation, I dove head-first into the Autoimmune Protocol (AIP) diet. This diet is not for the faint of heart. But, as a friend reminded me, "nothing tastes as good as feeling good feels." I found that to be absolutely true. I can't even begin to describe the changes I felt in my physical body within a matter of weeks. By removing the inflammatory foods and giving my body a chance to heal itself, I began functioning again. Slowly at first, but it was enough to help me keep going.

At the same time as implementing AIP, we ran the Cyrex food sensitivity test, which gave a clearer picture of the foods I was reacting to personally. Not only were we working with the eliminations of AIP, but also a list of other foods that were causing inflammation in my body. I genuinely think that by eliminating the foods on these two lists, my body finally got the break it so desperately needed. It got a chance to rest, repair, and reset from the damage the inflammation had caused for years.

Unlike a lot of stories, mine doesn't start the diagnosis process with magnetic resonance imaging (MRI). Because of COVID, it was difficult to get in for one. Dr. Imber felt confident we were dealing with multiple sclerosis (MS), based on history and symptoms. In June 2020, I finally received an MRI, confirming the diagnosis of multiple sclerosis. While patiently waiting felt difficult at the time, I'm actually thankful for the order in which things took place. I was able to work on healing with therapies, diet, and supplements before the diagnosis. When it finally came, I had some successes under my belt. I think that was a big part of why I chose to continue my journey on a holistic path. It was the only thing I'd done over the two-and-a-half-year journey that provided any help.

It's been nearly three years since my diagnosis. As cliché as it sounds, I can honestly say I'm not just surviving with MS—I'm thriving! But it hasn't been easy. While I've had great support from family, friends, and my doctor, it's not the same as hearing personal experiences from people who have chosen to walk the same path. I wish so badly there had been a resource like this available when I started this journey. It would have saved me countless hours, scouring Google and Instagram with the hashtag #thisisms for people with similar stories.

But that's just it: they're similar, not the same. I've heard it said that MS is the snowflake disease. No two people are alike. Just as frequency,

severity, and location of symptoms vary from person to person, so do the many ways of treating and managing them. I love being on a journey of learning what works for my body and what doesn't. I'm excited to share them with you here.

If you've been around the MS world for any amount of time, especially on the holistic side of things, there's no doubt that you've heard of the huge impact that the right diet can have on symptoms. With my doctor's recommendation, I started with the Autoimmune Protocol. For the first several months, I did the elimination phase of the diet. It was tough! During this time, I paid close attention to how my body was feeling. I felt great. Symptoms were lessened, and I felt better than I had in a long time. I knew it was attributed to diet, but at the time, I didn't realize the full extent.

A few months into the diet, my husband brought me home a Strawberry Cheesecake Blizzard from Dairy Queen. Having not had treats in a while on the AIP elimination, I was so excited to enjoy it. I genuinely didn't think that a little bit of ice cream was going to impact me in a big way. I was so wrong! The next day, my dizziness and balance issues were back in full force. I remember being outside with my family on a spring day, sitting in a chair, curled up with a blanket because I didn't feel well enough to join in on the playing. At that point, I knew my dietary choices were going to be a big piece of the puzzle going forward.

Since then, I've stayed strict on AIP, working my way through the reintroductions. I've found things I can add back into my diet (eggs and nuts) and things that will likely always be a no-go for my body (nightshade vegetables). This varies widely from person to person but so worth the time, effort, and intention it takes to narrow down what makes you feel well. While it's easy to get caught up in what you're eliminating, I was given great advice early on to focus on what you're adding like nutrient density, more vegetables, and high quality ingredients instead.

Managing a strict diet like this long-term can be daunting. I imagine it's a pretty big reason that people don't start in the first place. It's not a good feeling when you're starving and open the fridge, only to realize there's nothing prepared for you to easily grab. Been there, done that. Having a meal prep plan saved my life in this area, quite literally. There are plenty of ways you can go about this, but I'll share what's worked for me personally. Maybe it'll be a jumping off point for you in figuring out your own plan.

As I'm writing this, I'm eating lunch made of my "cheater" meal prep. One of my favorite meal prep hacks is to not make meals at all. Instead, I prepare a protein while roasting a huge variety of vegetables for the week. Throughout the week, I combine them in different ways, depending on what sounds good, adding different spices or sauces for more flavor. For example, on a Sunday afternoon, I throw several chicken breasts in a crockpot, along with roasted brussels sprouts, broccoli, carrots, parsnips, sweet potatoes, and onion. That usually gets me through a week of lunches. Then, I include AIP dinners during the week, utilizing the "cook once, eat twice" rule.

Another thing that has made it easier for me to stick to AIP so well is having variety in my meals. While I do my "cheater" prep once a week, I also love including new recipes for dinner. This keeps it interesting and forces me to try new foods, varieties, and flavors. At the end of this chapter, I've listed some of my favorite AIP blogs and recipe websites. There are so many available! Hands down, my favorite AIP friendly blog is "Unbound Wellness" [unboundwellness.com]. I haven't found a single recipe there that wasn't wonderful.

All in all, I feel like adjusting my diet and being intentional about what foods I put in my body has made the single biggest difference for me. Removing inflammatory foods and replacing them with nutrient dense foods would be beneficial for anybody. But for someone with MS, I can say from personal experience, the benefits of an anti-inflammatory diet outweigh the difficulty of giving up familiarity and comfort. If you love to cook and bake like me, it's really a fun challenge to learn how to do things differently with new ingredients.

After implementing dietary changes, supplements came next on the list. I've said it before, and I'll say it again—there is no "one size fits all" approach. This rings true for supplements, as well. Over the years, I've tweaked and changed what I take to find the best fit. I think I've finally settled on a good routine that works well for my body.

My first step was to work on repairing my gut lining. There's so much research available that explains the connection between a leaky gut and the development of an autoimmune disease. At my doctor's direction, I tackled this right away with a few products by Apex Energetics Nutritional Complexes called RepairVite and ClearVite. Both are formulated to support immune and gastrointestinal health. I currently take one scoop a day of each blended into unsweetened coconut milk and drink it quickly. It's not my favorite, but if it's doing its job—it's worth it!

As we all know, inflammation plays a huge role in MS symptoms, so it's important to keep it under control. When I feel like my symptoms are beginning to flare up for any reason, I take two supplements that help calm down inflammation. The first is called Turmero, made from turmeric extract; the second is Resvero, both also from Apex Energetics Nutritional Complexes. Typically, I take 10 ml/day of each while symptoms persist. I also take two capsules of EnteroVite daily which delivers short-chain fatty acids and butyric acid to replenish what my body needs due to the elimination of grains and dairy products.

In addition to the Apex supplements, I take 4,000 IU of vitamin D and omega 3 with dha/epa daily. Currently, I'm taking Nordic Naturals ProOmega 650 EPA/450 DHA. When I get sick with cold or flu symptoms (or my double run-ins with COVID) my MS symptoms always flare up alongside. When that happens, I add 50 mg of zinc, 1000 mg of vitamin C, and 500 mg of lysine into the mix.

Admittedly, I've always been an old lady when it comes to sleep. I like to go to bed early to ensure lots of rest. When faced with the decision between going out for an evening activity or staying in and going to bed, it's always been an easy choice for me. With the exception of the years tending to little babies, I've always been able to prioritize sleep. When it came to making lifestyle changes after my diagnosis, this one wasn't as challenging for me. Even though it's easier, it's still something I have to make a conscious effort to keep as a priority.

Falling asleep isn't typically an issue for me (hello, four kids) but middle of the night wakeups are a completely different story (hello, MS bladder). I've found that when I use calming scents, I sleep better overall and have an easier time falling back to sleep in the middle of the night. A few scented things I like to incorporate into my bedtime routine when I have the chance (time doesn't always allow for all of them) are a bath bomb in a warm bath, lavender scented lotion, and my full skincare routine. I currently use organic natural skin care products from a company called Be Well [bewellcompany.com] and they're amazing! The founder, Natalie, was diagnosed with MS many years ago and changed her lifestyle to manage her symptoms. I love supporting their business and mission to bring clean skincare products to people.

Another thing that has really helped with falling back asleep is not checking my phone or watch for the time. When I do check the time, my mind starts to spiral with how much time is left to possibly fall asleep. The fear that I won't get any more sleep that night gets very loud, usually preventing me from falling back asleep. When I just roll over and take

some deep breaths (and ask my husband to stop snoring) it's much easier for me to fall back asleep!

A physical therapist friend of mine once used the phrase “motion is lotion”. I'd never heard it before, and I love it! I love the reminder that movement and motion is so soothing for our physical bodies. I'm a firm believer in the concept of “move it or lose it” for anyone, but even more so for those of us living with MS. I've seen the benefits of this in my own life, along with the drawbacks of not making movement a priority.

While I've never been much of an actual athlete, for the past ten years I've been very active. I love to hike, lift weights, bike, run, and swim. Leading up to my diagnosis, my fitness had to take a backseat to survival. I knew I had to figure out how to get back on track. Last year, when my ironman brother-in-law encouraged me to attempt a sprint triathlon, I figured it was worth a shot. I absolutely didn't feel ready, but I knew the challenge would keep me focused on making movement and fitness a priority. So, I did the unthinkable. And I loved it! I was so proud of what my body was able to accomplish in that race.

I've also had a front row seat to what happens when I allow movement to be pushed to the back burner which is different from listening to your body and resting when needed. Right after the triathlon, we decided to get a puppy for our family. I knew bringing her home would shake things up a bit, but I wasn't prepared for how scared I'd be to wake the sleeping puppy by sneaking into my basement gym! For several months after getting her, I just didn't. It was clear it was impacting me in more ways than one. I was exhausted, which seems counterintuitive, but all the research points to movement reducing fatigue. I didn't sleep nearly as well. The pain, tingling, and discomfort in my legs was noticeably more during this time.

I'm currently working toward running my first half marathon. It's terrifying, but I know it's helpful for me to have a goal to work toward. As I do this, one thing I've learned is that it's so crucial for me to listen to my body. I have pushed it too hard before, only to be met with a cranky body afterward, forced to spend the next day in bed recovering. If your body needs rest, then rest! Amid prioritizing movement, it's also important to pay attention to the cues that your body is giving you. The more you learn to listen to those little cues, the easier life will be, and the better off you'll be long-term when it comes to movement.

It's no secret that stress impacts MS symptoms. Ask anyone, and I have a feeling they'd agree that stressful situations are a prime opportunity for

symptoms to flare. At the time of diagnosis, I had been dealing with several years of intense family stress. I have no doubt it played a role in my symptoms becoming full blown when they did. Stressful situations are an open door to increased inflammatory activity; something someone with an autoimmune disease should steer clear of.

I've never been one to regularly live at low levels of stress. In fact, I've always prided myself on how well I've handled stress over the years, typically by pushing through on my own, not accepting extra help, and not admitting there's a stressor in my life. I continued this pattern for a few years after my diagnosis. It worked for me, up until the moment it didn't anymore. I was exhausted, frazzled, and completely overwhelmed. I reached out to a friend who suggested counseling. I was in such a rough place that I was willing to give it a try.

In our first session, my counselor asked, "What made you decide to seek out counseling now?" I told him I realized I couldn't keep going like I was anymore. I finally admitted that the stressful lifestyle I was living wasn't serving me well, and I needed to make a change. I have been seeing my counselor now for nearly two years, and it has helped with my stress levels immensely. I have more strategies for coping with being overwhelmed, and I've learned to use my voice more in hard situations. I've tackled challenging things from other stages of my life that had been causing extra layers of stress. I recently, with a few extra nudges, joined group counseling. Having the extra safe space for my hard work has helped calm down my stress in huge ways.

In addition to counseling, having a strong faith in God has also really helped me keep my stress levels in check. This comes in many different forms: bible reading, books, attending church, worship music, prayer, and journaling. In times of stress, I can pick a few from this list and put them into practice. Different times call for different options, but I have a variety of tools available to me. Overall, knowing that I don't have to know the whole plan to trust the God who made the plan is a stress reliever in itself. Whether or not I always remember this part is a totally different story.

The final thing that is huge for my stress management personally is friendship—true, encouraging, connected friendship. For the most part, I don't share a lot of MS related things with my friends. The reality is that I have stress from all different areas of life, MS just happens to be one of them. Having a group of friends to be able to share and process with when the stress and feelings become too much is vital. They help me stay calm and rational amidst what could often spiral into extra stressful

situations. Having support from people around me has been pivotal in helping to keep stress in check.

The final piece to managing my MS holistically and with lifestyle changes are my biweekly doctor's appointments with my functional neurologist. When I was sharing my story aloud in preparation for this chapter, it really struck me how fortunate I am to have this resource available to me. I know not everyone has access to a doctor who is one hundred percent in their corner. He not only supports my lifestyle choices but also has a wealth of knowledge to encourage changes that actually make a difference. On top of that, his experience with neurological disorders allows him to treat the root causes of my symptoms in very specific ways.

He explained it to me like this. Imagine MS like a city on fire. The initial goal is to put out the fire which is a metaphor for calming the immune system. This is done through prioritizing nutrition, supplements, stress management, etc. After the fire is out, he comes in with neuro rehab and therapy. Essentially, his job is to rebuild the buildings (or the parts of the brain) that are damaged from inflammation. For example, when I flare up, I tend to notice left-side symptoms like tingling and sensory issues. That's tied to the right parietal lobe. When I go to my appointments, we focus on exercises that stimulate that area of the brain to encourage healthy pathways.

As thankful as I am for his support, he once told me that neurotherapy is actually the third or fourth line of defense in managing my MS. He wholeheartedly agrees that diet, stress management, and supplements are huge in symptom management and should be the first steps on an autoimmune journey. Thankfully, I had his support and encouragement figuring those pieces out in the very beginning because it was extremely overwhelming deciding where to start.

Early on in my MS journey, as I was listening to podcasts to sort through all the available information, I remember hearing someone use the phrase "control the controllables". Over the past three years, I've made that my MS mantra. If I have learned anything about this disease, it's that it's unpredictable. A flare can come on without warning. Any new twinge, pain, or sensation sends my mind wandering to possibilities and worst case scenarios. There are so many things about my body that are outside of the realm of my control. But there are also so many areas where I get to maintain control. Focusing on those has made the journey, while still terrifying at times, more manageable.

To those newly diagnosed or (impatiently) awaiting a diagnosis, I would say be kind to yourself. Go slow in taking in information. It's overwhelming, even on a good day. Try not to jump straight to applying every bit of information you hear and read to your specific situation. The possibilities of how this disease will progress are endless. It's important to allow yourself to feel the fear, sadness, grief, and the rollercoaster of emotions as you walk into the unknown.

While you can count on the hard days to come, you can also count on being able to find joy in the midst of them, if you're willing. Contrary to most conventional doctors, I believe that not all people need medication to manage their MS symptoms. I absolutely believe that anyone, regardless of medication choices, can benefit from lifestyle changes. Only good can come from fueling, moving, and caring for your body in such practical ways. It's so possible to live a full, active, wonderful life after an MS diagnosis. Is it easy? Nope. Does it take extra focus and effort? Yep. But is it worth it? Absolutely!

Resources:

Diet

AIP Blogs- Just a few of my favorites!

unboundwellness.com

autoimmunewellness.com

healyeatsreal.com

healmedelicious.com

gohealthywithbea.com

thepaleomom.com

Supplements

Apex Energetics Nutritional Complexes: Repair-Vite, Clear-Vite, Enterovite, Turmero, Resvero

Vitamin D

Omega 3 with DHA/EPA

Zinc

Lysine

Vitamin C

Sleep

bewellcompany.com

Dr. Visits

Dr. Matthew Imber - Interactive Neurology

www.interactiveneurology.com (630) 637-8887

FINAL NOTE

"Before you heal someone, ask him if he is willing to give up the things that made him sick." -Hippocrates

As we reach the end of this book, I hope these stories have not only inspired you but also encouraged you to take a moment to reflect on your own life. The purpose of this book has been to shine a light on aspects that deserve recognition and change. It's not just about MS or autoimmune diseases; it's a call to awareness, an invitation to slow down and reevaluate our lives.

Our ancestors had wisdom we can learn from, and with today's technology and knowledge, we can create a healthier, more harmonious world, instead of heading down a destructive path. It's as simple as pausing to take a deep breath, enjoying the smell of flowers, and appreciating the beauty that surrounds us.

We hope you've found this book to be a valuable guide. In closing, remember that while healing isn't guaranteed, it's always within reach. The life you choose to lead is firmly in your hands. Join us on **www.BeatingMultipleSclerosis.com** to explore all the limitless possibilities together.