



**After the Diagnosis of MS,
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**AFTER THE DIAGNOSIS
Initial Reactions**

Miriam Franco, PsyD, MSCS, is a psychotherapist and psychoanalyst who specializes in working with individuals coping with chronic illness. She recently developed an app that focuses on relaxation and guided meditations for coping with the challenges of MS.

Dr. Franco explains, "First reactions can range from shock, disbelief, and anger, to fear and denial. These are all adaptive and predictable responses that you may experience initially. If you had to wait months or years for a definitive diagnosis after living with puzzling, unexplained symptoms, or if you doubted your perceptions, the diagnosis can bring some relief. This is especially true if you've been told 'this is all in your head.'

"Most MS doctors are aware that individuals need time to grasp what is happening, to learn and understand what may be involved, and to find out about what treatment options are available. Time is needed to not only build a treatment plan, but to also develop trust and a supportive relationship with healthcare practitioners."

Your family will need time as well to adjust to the diagnosis and people react to a diagnosis in different ways. Some want to learn everything they can about MS as soon as possible. Education can come in many forms, from informative websites, publications, and videos, to support groups, educational programs, and one-on-one discussions with your healthcare professionals. Be sure that you are keeping the amount of information at a reasonable level and are consulting reliable resources, such as MSAA or other major MS organizations.

While some want to get information, others may become upset and "turn off" at the idea of learning more about the disease. They know that getting MS is not fair, that it is not anyone's fault, but they may still ask, "Why me?" Other common reactions are great concern and over-protectiveness. A spouse or parents (including a parent of an adult with MS) can often feel this way, and in their worry for your safety and health, may infringe upon your independence. Learning about the disease and having open communication about your symptoms, along with the precautions you are taking, can greatly help to reduce the anxiety that your spouse, parents, or others close to you may be experiencing.

Dr. Franco continues, "It's important to keep in mind that if any of your initial reactions to having MS become unmanageable or too uncomfortable, you'll find that much support is available. Major MS organizations such as MSAA provide resources for support, including helplines, educational videos and publications, and assistance with locating psychologists and social workers, who can help people cope with the emotions and stress of MS. Support groups can also be very helpful."