

MS[®] PROGRESS Report

Finding meaning in MS: Meet Anna Giannakouros

For 10 years, Anna's multiple sclerosis (MS) was invisible. There were many times she would experience symptoms – like numbness and weakness in her legs – but no one could tell. She was doing everything she could to be the healthiest and most active version of herself.

But then, the disability in her legs worsened. Her MS became more apparent. “An MRI of my spinal cord revealed that it was covered in new lesions,” recalls Anna.

Anna made the difficult decision to stop working in the IT industry. Soon after, she participated in a stem cell clinical trial that could possibly help prevent progression – but unfortunately, her MS ultimately did become secondary-progressive MS.

“It was devastating,” says Anna. “I had to come to terms with the fact that I would not improve past this point and that I would likely get worse every year.”

Anna has since accepted that she will be disabled in the future. She says it's been difficult – but that it's important to accept the emotion and to understand that it's a normal and valid feeling, and then let it go.



“I'm learning to live every day to its full potential,” says Anna. “But I do still worry about how far my MS will progress. My biggest fear is that I will be completely dependent on other people one day. It's a valid fear,



but I don't dwell on it. It's a thought that I let pass so that I can continue to live a more fulfilling life.”

Today, Anna says she's been humbled living with this disease – and that it's inspired her to give back. “I've always been a giving person but after being diagnosed with MS, I've made it a priority to donate to help other Canadians living with this disease,” says Anna.

“What's important in life is that we connect with others, and we support each other. There's nothing better than helping people in need.”

Anna wants others to know that when people donate to the MS Society, they're helping people fight something that is harder to fight on their own. People living with MS across the country need support and love to continue the fight against this disease.

“I want people who are newly diagnosed to find meaning in their diagnosis,” says Anna. “Just because you've been diagnosed with a chronic illness it does not mean that it's the end of your life. It's the beginning of becoming the best version of yourself.”



A Message from the President

Dr. Pamela Valentine

It's been an exciting year of progress. MS researchers are bringing more life-changing breakthroughs from the

lab into the homes of Canadians living with MS every single day. And the incredible strides we've made are all possible thanks to you. After all, the majority of our funding comes from our generous supporters.

Together, we've maintained our research momentum through the trials and tribulations of the past couple years – and every day brings us closer to an “aha!” moment that can change the future of MS forever. As you'll read in your **MS Progress Report**, the field of MS research has never been more exciting. Please know that your unwavering generosity is helping us unlock the many secrets of MS.

Please also know that your support brings much-needed community and connection to Canadians facing this disease across the country. As we begin to tiptoe toward a new normal, we are seeing the lasting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic – and the continued importance of care resources like our MS Knowledge Network and 1:1 Peer Support Program.

Looking ahead to what's on the horizon for the MS community, it's become more crucial than ever that we continue pushing for progress. We must forge ahead with a cautious optimism about what this next year can bring us in terms of MS treatments and therapies. We cannot afford to stop or slow down now – not while we're getting closer and closer to a cure.

Now is the time to renew the certainty of our mission and strengthen our resolve. **When we work together, we can be an unstoppable force for good.** I hope you'll continue your support today – and help us achieve even more for our fellow Canadians living with MS. Thank you in advance for your compassion and commitment.

Sincerely,

Dr. Pamela Valentine
President and Chief Executive Officer
Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada

Know the facts. Help the fight.

MS threatens our family members, friends, and neighbours:



Approximately 12 Canadians are diagnosed with this disease every day.



The average age of diagnosis is 43 years.



Women are three times more likely to be diagnosed with MS than men.



Canada has one of the highest rates of MS in the world.



Over 90,000 Canadians are living with MS today.



Worldwide, there are 2.8 million people living with MS.



Prevalence of MS everywhere continues to increase.

For the sake of those we love, we must continue pushing for progress. Thank you for your support as we work to defeat MS.

Longitudinal Study Suggests Epstein-Barr Virus as a Leading Cause and Trigger of MS

A big piece of the MS research puzzle is understanding what causes MS, so we can prevent it and more effectively treat it. And now, thanks to new evidence out of Harvard, scientists believe the culprit could be something most of us have had – Epstein-Barr virus (EBV).

Researchers at Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health and Harvard Medical School examined a cohort of over 10 million young adults in the US military, 955 of whom were diagnosed with MS over a 20-year period to understand the causes of MS. **Following examination of blood samples and clinical data, researchers found that the risk of MS increased 32-fold after infection with EBV, a virus that causes infectious mononucleosis and has long been suspected to be a risk factor for MS.**

This study provides the strongest evidence to-date showing the association between EBV infection and the development of MS. Given that most of the population is infected with EBV, we need to

understand why only a fraction of individuals infected with EBV go on to develop MS. It might mean that other genetic and environmental factors are needed to initiate MS onset. Understanding the biological mechanisms for how EBV triggers MS will be key and could lead to targeted interventions that might prevent MS before it starts.

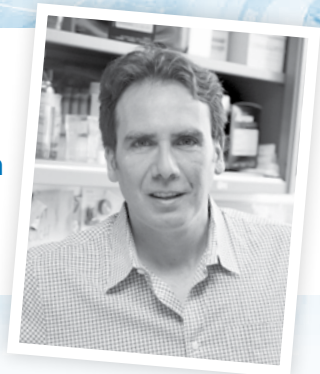


LIGHT:
Dr. Alexandre Prat

Dr. Prat is a neurologist at CHUM (Montréal) and a Professor and Chairman of the Department of Neurosciences at Université de Montréal. He also now holds the Senior Canada Research Chair in Multiple Sclerosis. In his lab, a lot of his research revolves around identifying and validating novel therapeutic targets for treating MS.

In collaboration with more than 50 other scientists across Canada, Dr. Prat is participating in the **Canadian Prospective Cohort Study to Understand Progression in People Living with MS (CanProCo)**. CanProCo is a unique initiative with an over-arching goal to better understand and treat MS progression. A recently announced new sub-cohort will focus on pediatric-onset multiple sclerosis (POMS) and its impact on cognitive maturation and development in those diagnosed before

“My patients and my desire to improve their lives are my greatest sources of inspiration to continue advancing MS research.”



age 18. The project will allow for long-term follow-up of participants, a better understanding of the disease trajectory and greater insights into MS disease progression from childhood to adulthood.

“The MS Society has been crucial for my research over the years,” says Dr. Prat. “With its operational grants, it has allowed my team and our collaborators to pursue innovative research projects that otherwise would have been impossible.”

Dr. Prat’s work has the potential to change countless lives around the world – and to help make MS a thing of the past. We are so thankful to you for helping drive progress through promising research like this.

To learn more, visit mssociety.ca/research.

The Swank and Wahls Diets: What you need to know

Ever heard of the low-fat Swank diet or the Wahls elimination diet? If not, it may be time to read up on them. A recent study compared the effect of these diets in people living with relapsing-remitting MS (RRMS) and discovered that both diets were associated with meaningful reduction in perceived fatigue and improved quality of life.

The Swank diet, proposed by Roy Swank, MD, PhD, restricts the intake of saturated fats and oils and emphasizes fruits and vegetables, nonfat dairy products, and whole-grain cereals.

The Wahls elimination diet, a modified Paleolithic diet developed by Terry Wahls, MD, cuts out highly processed foods – especially high carbohydrate foods – and encourages the intake of meats, fish, and plant-based foods such as fruits, root vegetables, and nuts. The diet eliminates grains, dairy, legumes (such as soy), eggs and certain vegetables like tomatoes, potatoes, and peppers.

Researchers found that the majority of study participants across both diets reported clinically meaningful reductions in perceived fatigue at 12 weeks that was maintained by most at 24 weeks. Both groups showed significant improvements in reported quality of life.



More research is needed to better understand the role that diet plays in managing MS – but these findings show that people with RRMS may be able to reduce the effect of their MS-related symptoms through evidence-based dietary modifications. As always, if you're considering adopting any new kind of diet, please be sure to consult with your healthcare team.

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