

# Investigating the experiences of anxiety in people with multiple sclerosis during the COVID-19 pandemic

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## Background

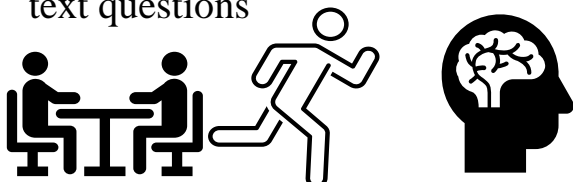
- **Anxiety** can be common in people with multiple sclerosis (PwMS)
- During the COVID-19 pandemic many PwMS may have experienced **increased distress and anxiety** while others may have experienced **reductions** in anxiety.
- A number of things may help reduce anxiety in MS, including social, psychological and lifestyle factors

### In our research we wanted to:

1. Identify the things that may help reduce anxiety in MS
2. Document the experiences of anxiety in PwMS during the COVID-19 pandemic

## What we did

- A **survey** was developed with input from a patient panel of PwMS
- A number of questions asked PwMS about their experiences with anxiety, as well as their social support, exercise habits, sense of control and MS acceptance
- The associates with anxiety were investigated using statistical techniques
- A process of thematic analysis was used to explore responses to open text questions



## What we found

- 287 PwMS from the UK and Ireland took part in our study

### Factors associated with anxiety:

1. Self efficacy (control over MS)
2. Tolerance of uncertainty
3. Social support
4. Exercise habits

### Factors not associated with anxiety in our study:

1. Socio-demographic variables (age, gender, employment status etc.)
2. MS Acceptance
3. Optimism

### The main themes we found were:

1. **Personal Health Concerns** (n= 121) ‘I have never liked being in crowded places, but i feel extra anxious now when people get close to me in public’
2. **Social Concerns** (n= 71) ‘Not being able to meet friends/family during covid has affected me very significantly’
3. **Responsibilities and Burdens** (n= 40) ‘My anxiety levels vary daily. It depends on pressures such as home schooling, working full time’
4. **No effect/Positive effect of the Pandemic on anxiety (n= 34)** ‘I actually think [sic] having to stay at home to work has helped ease anxiety.’

## Conclusion

While some PwMS experienced reductions in anxiety, most reported being more anxious during the pandemic. However, a number of factors may help reduce anxiety. This will be important in helping identify supports for PwMS