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## **Coping Strategies Associated with High Quality of Life in People Diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis: An Integrative Literature Review**

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# Coping Strategies Associated with High Quality of Life in People Diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis: An Integrative Literature Review

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## BACKGROUND

Today, many adults are living with some type of chronic illness. About 2.5 million people are living with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) worldwide, and about 570,000 Americans currently have the disease. Multiple Sclerosis is an autoimmune disease affecting the central nervous system (CNS). It causes inflammation and destruction of the myelin sheath, which surrounds and protects the nerve fibers. This leads to loss of axons in the CNS, causing disruption in the communication among neurons contributing to a variety of physical and cognitive symptoms (Faguy, 2016). The various stressors related to these symptoms can negatively impact one's quality of life. The individual must learn to cope with these stressors in order to improve his or her quality of life.

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to examine the types of coping strategies that have a positive impact on quality of life in individuals diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Lazarus's Stress, Coping, and Adaptation Theory describes the process of coping and different coping strategies. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) describe coping as a process with dependence on how the individual perceives a threat. An individual experiences stress when he or she encounters something that he or she perceives as taxing or something that exceeds his or her resources. The individual copes with a situation by managing his or her appraisal. The two types of coping are problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping is when the individual actually changes the person-environment relationship while emotion-focused coping changes the meaning of the situation. The result of successful coping is adaptation which is "the capacity of a person to survive and flourish." Successful adaptation can lead to better quality of life.

Quality of life is defined as "a person's sense of well-being that stems from satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the areas of life that are important to him or her" (Ferrans, 1990, p.15). The four domains of QOL are health and functioning, social and economic, psychological and spiritual, and family.

## METHODS

### Design

- Integrative literature review

### Literature Search Strategies

- Databases searched: Cumulative Index of Nursing and Allied Health (CINAHL) Complete, PubMed, PsychInfo, and Academic Search Complete.

### Literature Search Limitations and Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

- Inclusion Criteria:
  - Written in English, from the years 1998 – 2016, and are peer reviewed.
  - Addressed specific coping strategies and their impact on quality of life in those with MS
- Exclusion criteria: did not mention specific coping strategies or if the researchers' definition of quality of life and its domains was significantly different than the one mentioned previously.

## RESULTS

- Both emotion focused coping strategies and problem focused coping strategies positively affected overall quality of life or one of its domains.

### Positive Emotion Focused Coping Strategies

Coping Strategy	Domain(s) of QOL
Seeking social support	Physical, psychological
Stopping unpleasant emotions	Psychological, decreases anxiety and depression
Acceptance	Psychological, decreases anxiety and depression
Releasing emotions	Physical, psychological
Maintaining a positive attitude	Physical, psychological, financial

### Positive Problem Focused Coping Strategies

Coping Strategy	Domain(s) of QOL
Setting realistic goals	Psychological
Changing the situation	Psychological
Altering goals	Physical, psychological

## DISCUSSION

- Since Multiple Sclerosis is a chronic progressive condition with no cure, it may be difficult to utilize problem focused coping; therefore, emotion focused strategies were used more often.
- People may be unable to alter the situation or the stressors themselves so, adopting strategies aimed at changing or addressing emotions can be beneficial
- The psychological domain of quality of life was affected more than any other domain
- Family and friends can provide encouragement, help with physical activities such as cleaning and driving, and provide financial support
- If the individual accepts his or her diagnosis, he or she can then focus on how to manage the condition and any lifestyle changes that need to be made in order to be successful
- Releasing negative emotions can help clear the mind and encourage communication about these emotions with others.
- By setting goals, people with MS are playing an active role in bettering themselves which can lead to a feeling of accomplishment and higher self-esteem.

## LIMITATIONS

- Did not address many factors that may play a role in the strategies utilized such as personality or stage of MS
- Some studies suggested that certain strategies led to decreased anxiety and depression; however, it is also possible that preexisting anxiety and depression may play a role in which coping mechanisms are used.

## CONCLUSIONS

Living with a chronic illness can affect one's overall well-being and quality of life. Individuals with MS must manage various symptoms and stressors on a daily basis, putting them at risk for poor quality of life. Utilizing strategies based on acceptance, addressing emotions, and setting realistic goals can help improve the quality of life in people diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis.

## REFERENCES

1. Ferrans, C.E. (1990). Development of a quality of life index for patients with cancer. *Oncology Nursing Forum*, 17(3), 15-19.
2. Lazarus, R.S. & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, Appraisal, and Coping*. New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company, Inc.