

**Media Release****BC woman with MS determined to outrun unpredictable, disabling disease one marathon/triathlon at a time**

TORONTO, May 20, 2025 – The fact that only 90,000 Canadians have multiple sclerosis makes it harder for those who do have it to navigate its challenges in part because there is such limited awareness of it. MS is relatively rare compared to diseases like diabetes and cancer, and highly variable and sometimes invisible. The average person may not fathom the Herculean effort required of people with MS simply to get through each day while also trying to seem as normal as possible.

For Pitt Meadows resident Michelle Taschereau who was diagnosed with MS in 2012, a major hurdle for her with the disease that few may grasp is living with the constancy of fear. Fear of the next relapse, of what it'll be, how long it will last, and what will be lost because of it. And, fear of not knowing the boundaries and what could happen if pushed too far.

While optic neuritis (inflammation in the optic nerve causing pain, vision loss and other symptoms) was what sealed her MS diagnosis, Taschereau has also endured leg paralysis, bilateral limb swelling, single limb swelling, neuralgia in the face, arms and legs, cluster headaches, fatigue, and the MS hug (an uncomfortable, sometimes painful feeling of tightness or pressure around the stomach or chest).

Her MS road has been potholed with severe relapses as well as reactions to some treatments and medications with dire if not life-threatening side effects. Since her diagnosis, she has suffered from trigeminal neuralgia (a condition that causes intense pain similar to an electric shock on one side of the face), spasming esophagus to the point of tearing, and muscle spasticity. These relapses have all left permanent damage, particularly the trigeminal neuralgia that resulted in facial paralysis and difficulty swallowing.

Still, she's chosen to stay on track and outpace the steam engine of a disease she can see over her right shoulder, hurtling towards her. After a bad relapse five years ago when she developed debilitating vertigo, was hospitalized for two weeks and was unable to walk independently for three months, she made the bold decision to take up running. She knew that exercise can have a healing effect and is good for neuroplasticity (a process that involves adaptive structural and functional changes to the brain and is defined as the ability of the nervous system to change its activity in response to intrinsic or extrinsic stimuli by reorganizing its structure, functions, or connections after injuries, such as stroke or traumatic brain injury).

Since then, Michelle has competed in half-marathons, marathons and triathlons. However, in her case, physical activity is not without its consequences, some quite unpleasant and even damaging. Exercise may ignite inflammation and MS predisposes one to extreme sensitivity to cold (and heat). She sustained an injury during a triathlon, which involved a lake swim. The lake temperature was too cold for her given her sensitivity. Her muscles cramped up and she had to withdraw from the competition.

Then, there's the fact that it takes a village to manage MS - whether that village be comprised of family, friends or, in Taschereau's case, a team of healthcare providers who administer physio, massage, acupuncture, and chiropractic care on an ongoing basis. During peak training, she needs to visit two of these healthcare providers per week.

"One of the biggest challenges with extreme exercise when you have MS is managing your body's response to heat and stress," said Taschereau. "Overheating or pushing too hard can trigger pseudo relapses, a temporary worsening of existing symptoms. It's a fine line balance between pushing your limits and protecting your nervous system. You have to listen carefully to your body and find the balance."

In addition to the physical ramifications, the psychological toll of being an athlete with MS is undeniable. When running alone in pain for hours, the thoughts in her head can become pretty dark. The tendency is to question each injury, hurt and feeling. Is this caused by MS? Is it new? Can this really be pulled off?

With every step, peddle or stroke along the way, she has to remind herself that it's her against MS.

### **MS Facts**

Common symptoms can include, but are not limited to: fatigue, lack of coordination, weakness, tingling, impaired sensation, vision problems, bladder and bowel problems, and cognitive and mood changes.

Globally, the most common barrier to getting an early diagnosis is a lack of awareness of MS symptoms among the public and healthcare professionals.

An early diagnosis is vital to enable early treatment with disease modifying therapies that can minimize relapses and reduce future disability. Diagnosis also allows for lifestyle changes to help manage MS and improve quality of life.

By learning more about this disease, fundraising, donating or volunteering you are making a difference in someone's life today and tomorrow. Learn more at [mscanada.ca/msawarenessmonth](https://mscanada.ca/msawarenessmonth).

### **About MS Canada**

At MS Canada, we are inspired by the vision of a world free of multiple sclerosis. We focus on support, advocacy and research that will positively impact the lives of people living with, and affected by MS. For over 75 years, we have been a trusted connection for the MS community to valuable resources and programs needed on their unique MS journey. We advocate for policy change that removes barriers and improves the well-being of persons affected by MS in Canada. We invest in life-changing research that will advance treatment and care, enhance well-being, help to understand and halt disease progression, and ultimately prevent MS. For more information visit [mscanada.ca](https://mscanada.ca).

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