

S3E42 Transcript

Pregnancy and MS: A Firsthand Account

Geoff Allix (1s):

Welcome to Living Well with MS, the podcast from Overcoming MS for people with multiple sclerosis interested in making healthy lifestyle choices. I'm your host Geoff Allix. Thank you for joining us for this new episode. I hope it makes you feel more informed and inspired about living a full life with MS. Don't forget to check out our show notes for more information and useful links. You can find these on our website at www.overcomingms.org/podcast. If you enjoy the show, please spread the word about us on your social media channels. That's kind of viral effect we can all smile about. Finally, don't forget to subscribe to the show on your favorite podcast platform so you never miss an episode.

Geoff Allix (44s):

Now without further ado, on with the show. Welcome to Living Well with MS. Today, we're talking about pregnancy and MS, with Ingrid Adelsberger. Getting pregnant is a topic that often spawns many questions, but this is especially so when you have MS and must balance health and lifestyle considerations against the desire to have a healthy pregnancy and start a family. Pregnancy and MS is an area that Overcoming MS covers extensively, but to really delve into this important discussion we at Living Well with MS thought there's nothing better than getting a firsthand account. That's where Ingrid Adelsberger comes in. So, Ingrid, welcome to Living Well with MS. We're here to discuss your experiences with pregnancy.

Geoff Allix (1m 27s):

But initially, could you tell us a little bit about yourself?

Ingrid Adelsberger (1m 30s):

Yes. Thank you so much for having me. I am originally from Vienna, Austria, and then I moved to New York in 2005. I've lived there for a little over 10 years and then moved with my family, with my husband because his family is in Southern California, so we moved in 2016 to LA. And I worked in New York as an event planner for 10 years. And then throughout my MS experience and OMS, I wanted to change careers and I studied another time and started health coaching. And this is kind of the career that I have been doing starting late 2016, and then obviously most importantly on today's topic in 2018, my wonderful daughter, Romy was born and she's almost three years old now, which I cannot believe.

Ingrid Adelsberger (2m 22s):

And we currently are in Vienna for the past [inaudible].

Geoff Allix (2m 25s):

And when were you first diagnosed with MS?

Ingrid Adelsberger (2m 28s):

I was diagnosed in 2011. March 2011.

Geoff Allix (2m 33s):

And when did you come across the OMS program?

Ingrid Adelsberger (2m 36s):

So, I pretty quickly found Swank and I remember that day very well and checked the internet out right away, because I read no chocolate and I was like, that's not for me. And then, but it somewhat worked in my, in the background of my mind, and so I started an elimination diet just a couple of months later, until the two months I really cut out wheat and dairy and everything, meat and all kinds of stuff. And then I found Swank again. And then the second time I was looking at it, I was like, you know, maybe that is the way to go. So, I started Swank then and on the Swank forum within a month, I'd found OMS and that changed my life because so many people were saying, you know, honestly it's very positive, it's stricter, but it has better chances and stuff like this.

Ingrid Adelsberger (3m 26s):

So, I decided to move over to OMS, and I did that in September or October of 2011. So, I didn't get started right away, but I would say with everything before I almost started a couple of months later.

Geoff Allix (3m 42s):

And how have you found the OMS program. What have been the good things and the bad things about OMS?

Ingrid Adelsberger (3m 50s):

Yeah, so I would say, like many people in the beginning, I struggled with the diet, and I was super strict for a year. And then I had "relapsed" and, you know, I bounced back, and I ate, you know, many non-OMS compliant things for a little while, until I realized that I'm not the only one. And that happened during my OMS retreat in England, in 2013. And that's also when the idea for the cookbook was born, but-- and then obviously it got easier because knowing that others have a similar experience and working on the cookbook made it much, much easier.

Ingrid Adelsberger (4m 38s):

But in the beginning, I struggled very much with the diet. I never struggled with the workout, I believe. Like working out because I started already working out in my mid-twenties before that, not so much, but then, you know, I just did, I continued to do that. And I had different phases throughout OMS where I did yoga or where I was running, or I did a lot of gym exercises and it definitely got difficult throughout the pandemic. And so now I'm doing a lot from home, either like it's a seven-minute HIT workout or it's yoga.

Ingrid Adelsberger (5m 20s):

And I do a lot of walking. I've always done a lot of walking because that's the thing that I really love.

Geoff Allix (5m 27s):

And you touched on it there, but you're the editor of the OMS cookbook. So how did you find that editing a book and dealing with all the recipes?

Ingrid Adelsberger (5m 38s):

The first thing I, if I knew what I'm getting myself into, I would have never done it. But the experience was really amazing because I met so many people and lots, you know, including you, emailing with people about the recipes, so many other things. And there were some really long exchanges with different people from all over the world. That was really, really nice. And I would also say that was, hopefully not the peak, but it was around five years after I started OMS which is the time that they say this is when the diet really comes to full.

Ingrid Adelsberger (6m 23s):

How do you say the full fruition?

Geoff Allix (6m 25s):

And you must've like, because you tried all the recipes, didn't you? So, you must have, like from around the world, must be really interesting to try.

Ingrid Adelsberger (6m 34s):

It was great. And it also minimized eating out, right? Because there's nothing that I craved, you know, I mean, I made more cakes every week than I should have eaten and all other things. So, I think I was super clean OMS and very tasty and lots of fun, lots of work too, but it was great. It definitely was great. That is actually my up-- I meant to say that, that is my up. When we talk about ups and downs, that was definitely one of my greatest OMS ups that I can say.

Geoff Allix (7m 9s):

And so, we're talking about pregnancy and MS on this podcast. So, on topic of pregnancy, you mentioned that you welcomed, is it Romy, your daughter? When you first started thinking about having a family? What were your concerns about being pregnant while having MS?

Ingrid Adelsberger (7m 33s):

I must say ignorance is bliss. So even though I knew that there could be some negative flare ups or negative implications, is that the right word to say? But I really didn't think too much before getting pregnant at all, things like this. When we started to talk about having a family, I was 35 and I had Romy when I was 37. So, at this point I was more concerned about being an old mom. And it wasn't necessarily about what implications would the MS and the pregnancy have, because I always understood that pregnancy was really good.

Ingrid Adelsberger (8m 24s):

It's more the postpartum that I was worried about, and I was worried about her developing MS. So, I was definitely thinking a lot about that. And we started already during the pregnancy I remember reading a lot on the OMS website and asking people and you know, what can I do that she will not get OMS. I'm sorry, that she will not get MS. So, I try, you know, the first year super strict having her on OMS, which I don't know if that's completely the right thing, because you know, when they're so little, they need more. So now that she's three, we are doing that, she's not a hundred percent OMS, but I do try to offer her much vegetables.

Ingrid Adelsberger (9m 15s):

You know, I have all these great thoughts of like, you know, I'm a health coach and my daughter is going to eat all the vegetables and not cheese. But I do my best to offer and over and over again and making sure that she eats as healthy as possible. And everybody that I talk to says, like, you know, I bet she's doing really well better than others.

Geoff Allix (9m 36s):

I mean, I think with my kids, I try to rank how bad things are in that, that we shouldn't eat in a diet. And so, my kids are dairy free, they don't have any red meat, they have some chicken. So, they have basically my diet plus chicken. They do have some vitamin D supplementation. They're very sporty and active anyway. So, they're -- the way I see it is I think, well, that's got to be much, much better than a typical diet and certainly a diet I had growing up and they're aware as well, and they wouldn't dream of smoking or, you know, they know that because my father had MS.

Geoff Allix (10m 21s):

So, they know their grandfather had MS. Their father has MS. So, to them, there's an obvious pattern. Like, okay, if I don't do things right, I'm the next generation.

Ingrid Adelsberger (10m 33s):

But you can wait till they're older so they can--

Geoff Allix (10m 37s):

Yeah. I think there's a risk if you go too strict that they could rebel as well.

Ingrid Adelsberger (10m 41s):

Exactly. So that's what I'm trying to do, right now, and she's allowed, she doesn't drink milk, so she drinks soy milk, but she does get, you know, a croissant or something like that, now and then, because she loves it, and you can't cut everything it's not like that. We have sweets at home and we really, I'm trying to give her as little chocolate and sugar as possible. So, for example, I have this, actually, I bought that for myself, these bars that are made out of dates and cocoa powder, and she loves those too. So, I think it's like when you offer her stuff like that, then she doesn't know the difference from this to a Twix bar.

Ingrid Adelsberger (11m 27s):

So, I think before I was pregnant, I always say, at home we eat what mama eats and when you're out, you can also have other stuff. So that's kind of how we've been doing it. And she eats almost no meat because we don't eat meat

at home, now and then she eats chicken. There were really some rare occasions that she would eat some other meat, but she's not used to it. So, she doesn't really like that.

Geoff Allix (11m 53s):

And during pregnancy, are there any special precautions that you took during pregnancy?

Ingrid Adelsberger (12m 1s):

I tried pretty much only OMS and try to stay as true to OMS as I can, especially when we talk about diet. Diet, so definitely that it was sometimes difficult because obviously people tell you, you know, you need dairy, you need meat, you need eggs, all those kinds of things. And so, there were many times that I was like, what if I'm doing the wrong thing for my child? And then I would go back to OMS, ask somebody, and would come back and say that was okay. But she was a small baby when she was born, and she was pretty light. So, I blamed myself for a long time that it's my fault because I'm fairly tall and so is my husband. And so, she was not a big baby when she was born.

Ingrid Adelsberger (12m 42s):

So, I was really scared that it's my fault, but it means they're starting to prove that it's all turning out how it should be turning out, and that's good. So, there was also a nurse that I had during, from my insurance during pregnancy that I said, like, you should be eating fish oil and stuff like that. And then again, went back to OMS, is a bit of flax oil not enough, and got back into like, continue what you're doing, you're fine. So, I kept on doing all these things, but I did worry about it. So, if you are doing OMS and you are pregnant or want to get pregnant, just trust, trust and believe that OMS is the right thing.

Geoff Allix (13m 25s):

Yeah. I think there's a lot of-- in the health system that they, there's a lot of belief in the way they've always done things. And in the UK certainly we have dairy as a food group, as a required food group. But then when you think about it, the dairy one, when it was explained to me, and I've said this many times, but it's just not normal to have breast milk from another species. No animal on earth does that apart from you. I can't believe that's normal.

Ingrid Adelsberger (14m 2s):

Yeah. That is actually the one thing that just came up with a conversation with a friend that I'm realizing, Romy has been a hundred percent breastfed. She has never had one single formula. And that was one of my wishes and goals that she would not have dairy when, like very early on. As I said, now, obviously she has a little bit of a croissant or something here and there, but she has not had dairy. And I probably breastfed her over two years. So, she has not had any of that early on.

Geoff Allix (14m 39s):

And that's shown to be good anyway, isn't it? Just generally for the general population?

Ingrid Adelsberger (14m 44s):

Luckily, I think they say six months, but then the World Health Organization says even two years. So, I think the longer you do it, the better it is. I believed that that was one of the things I can do to start her off the best way in this life. I hope it's true.

Geoff Allix (15m 8s):

So how did you find it having MS and being pregnant? Did it, did having MS affect your pregnancy or being pregnant and affect your MS during and after pregnancy?

Ingrid Adelsberger (15m 21s):

So, during pregnancy, I would say, no, at the very end, I had some days where I had a little bit of symptoms, but it wouldn't be like days and days, all day long. It would bend like once or twice, and I could feel something and then it was, that was it, that was the only thing. I must say I had, I think, a dreamy pregnancy. I really, I worked out until month seven. And the last couple of months I did maybe yoga and walking. I did hypnobirthing.

Ingrid Adelsberger (16m 2s):

I prepared myself with hypnobirthing for the actual birth. So, then I did those type of meditations, during that time. I slept so much, I wish I could sleep like this again. I just really, really, especially being "an old mom", I had a fantastic pregnancy. It was really a good time. Unfortunately, afterwards, maybe not so I think very much what the book says, six months after pregnancy is when I had, looking back now, maybe a relapse or definitely flare up of old symptoms and stronger.

Ingrid Adelsberger (16m 50s):

And I think that I didn't, I was so well for so many years that I didn't even think, oh my gosh, this could be something really bad. So, I was like, okay, I'm just going to see and wait, wait it out. And it went away. So, then a few weeks after that, I got vertigo and that, again, I know a bunch of people that have vertigo, and they don't have MS. So, I went and at the time I was working, I was studying, I had a newborn baby. Maybe it was the stress that's what I was thinking. And so again, that went away after a few days and I was like, okay, I'm fine.

Ingrid Adelsberger (17m 33s):

You know, that has nothing to do with MS, well maybe it's postpartum or other stress or something like that. And so, looking back that may have been the time to talk to a neurologist, which at the time, I didn't maybe think about DMDs, because I have not taken them.

Geoff Allix (17m 58s):

And did you get any specialist advice from your obstetrician about having MS or from your neurologist about being pregnant? Was there any specialist advice you got?

Ingrid Adelsberger (18m 9s):

So, I did not see a neurologist throughout pregnancy. I actually wanted to, but it was one of these things that didn't happen until actually day 12 of Romy being alive already. I do remember exactly because the neurologist actually told me "Congratulations on your daughter." And so during the pregnancy, I didn't see a neurologist and I had a great doctor for throughout pregnancy and he was there for work. He didn't, we didn't, we did talk a little bit about it, but not crazy. He was very much about, okay, so you seem like, you know a lot about what you should be doing and how you are handling your MS.

Ingrid Adelsberger (18m 53s):

And you just continue to do what you are doing. And then I did have a doula during birth, I mean, during birth. And that again was not MS related, but that was to help that I kind of looked at to have a natural birth and to have somebody that supports me in a positive way, because I didn't want-- you hear all these stories on my, you know, this is, what's your pain level, how is this, all these kinds of negative things about childbirth, and I didn't want that. And I kind of surrounded myself with people that were very positive.

Ingrid Adelsberger (19m 32s):

And I was lucky that my gynecologist did follow my wishes and worked with me on all of them.

Geoff Allix (19m 39s):

And is there anything you would have done differently?

Ingrid Adelsberger (19m 43s):

Yeah, I think what I did, the biggest thing that I think back that I would have done differently is that I would have seen a neurologist right after this relapse or flare up or whatever it was. And maybe I would have done things differently back then. We're talking about 2019 now. Yeah.

Geoff Allix (20m 8s):

And so, and now it's a couple of years later, do you think that being pregnant and then having a baby in the long-term has it caused any effect on your MS symptoms, do you think?

Ingrid Adelsberger (20m 23s):
How do you mean in the long run?

Geoff Allix (20m 25s):
Because you said, so during pregnancy, you think actually you didn't, it probably-- and often it's said actually it could be a positive effect. It's actually protective of you as a mother. And then maybe afterwards, you might've had some flare ups or minor relapses, and then if you went forward another year, would you say actually, do you think that having a baby has actually changed your MS prognosis?

Ingrid Adelsberger (20m 55s):
Prognosis? I don't know. I don't know if anybody can say that, right. Because they always tell us they don't know what's going to happen, but I sadly must say that before April 2019, when these flare ups happened, I would say I barely had anything from MS. And that doesn't mean that I didn't have occasional symptoms. Like something, like, let's say you have to catch an early flight and you get up at four o'clock in the morning. Then I would drive myself to the airport. And I feel like my legs, a little weaker or a little tingling in here and there, I catch a two hour flight.

Ingrid Adelsberger (21m 36s):
I sleep on the plane, I get off and I'm fine. So, I would have things like this or as I said, I would have a normal sign here and there. A little bit of tingling, but that was it. But now, now I have certainly, symptoms. And--

Geoff Allix (21m 56s):
But you couldn't say that was due to pregnancy or, I mean, it's difficult, isn't it? Because this it's not just pregnancy, it's having a child as well. That's a kind of major change.

Ingrid Adelsberger (22m 9s):
It is especially difficult. And that is maybe one thing that I would do differently too. I didn't get MRIs for many, many years because I didn't feel the need to actually get MRIs. I was doing fine, and I felt if I do have a new lesion, I will be disappointed and depressed. But now looking back, if I would have done this, and every year I go for an MRI and every year I have a new lesion, then I probably would have done something, which I didn't because I didn't see the need to, and I felt fine.

Ingrid Adelsberger (22m 51s):
And I did, but now I went for an MRI last year. And then obviously there were some more lesions than in the first year. And so, nobody knows when they came, right. Did they come in 2015 or did they come during or afterwards? So, if I have something that I can give to, if I have any advice to give to people that are listening to this podcast and they want to get pregnant or they are pregnant and, please don't do what I did when it comes to doing MRIs. And I'm sure many don't do that, actually what I did, but just make sure that you are in a situation where, you know what's going on and you can do something.

Ingrid Adelsberger (23m 38s):
Because looking back, I would probably, I mean, you don't have, in hindsight, you all are smarter, but I would probably have started taking something in 2019.

Geoff Allix (23m 51s):
And if you have a newborn baby, as it was quite a long time ago for myself and my wife, but it's incredibly stressful. And for me, it was certainly before I was diagnosed with MS. Certainly before the noticeable symptoms. So how did you deal with the stress, and having MS is stressful, but how did you deal specifically with the stress of having a newborn while having MS? How did you manage the stress levels?

Ingrid Adelsberger (24m 24s):
I think, I don't know if I manage this really well to be honest, we were in a difficult situation in the sense that we were in LA and we were just us, my husband and me. And my husband is a really wonderful, involved dad and so he supported me a lot. One thing that I remember is I breastfed her at 6:00 AM, and then again at 10:00 AM and in

between, he let me sleep. So, stuff like that, that I got enough rest, because I think for any new mom, but especially for us with stress, sleep is really important to us. That is one thing that I tried to have.

Ingrid Adelsberger (25m 5s):

As I mentioned earlier already, I slept throughout pregnancy, like 10 hours every day. I love sleeping and resting, and then suddenly you can't do that anymore. And so, I tried to sleep as much as I could. And I also think if you can get the help, whatever that means, you know, family, friends, if you can afford getting extra help. I think that was really important and really, really helpful for any new mom, but especially with MS. So, I think whatever help I could get, it wasn't as much as I would have loved, but it helped to get that little bit of rest. And they always say when the baby sleeps you sleep, but that's really not always doable because you need to get something done and you want to get something done.

Ingrid Adelsberger (25m 55s):

And as I said, I was studying at the time. And so very often when she slept, I would write a paper, or I would read something. So as much as I could, I got the rest that was possible. So, I think my stress levels, I didn't meditate as much, like as I wanted to, definitely not daily. Like I do it now pretty religiously, but that was not right away. And I think that is something that is important, and I would have done differently.

Ingrid Adelsberger (26m 34s):

Does that answer your question?

Geoff Allix (26m 37s):

Yes, absolutely. So, thank you very much for answering these questions and enlightening mothers and prospective mothers about your experiences. Just one final thing, if you were to, to talk to someone who was considering going through the process and thinking about having a baby, would you say that it was overall a positive thing? So, given someone with MS, they're thinking about having a child, would you say, yes, it's been overall positive or actually maybe should avoid it completely?

Ingrid Adelsberger (27m 17s):

Absolutely. I mean, I don't think you have a child, and you look back, I should not have done it unless it was maybe an accident, but in our case, it wasn't. So, I would definitely, I mean, I'm so glad she's around. I think she teaches us so many things and it's just wonderful. I would not have wanted to miss out on that experience. With my MS in a different place right now without having a child maybe, but I don't know. Nobody really, nobody knows. And that would not be my life.

Ingrid Adelsberger (27m 57s):

That would not be the take home message, even that you shouldn't have a baby that may not, but I would, you know, they say it takes a village to raise a child. And I think that is true. And it's especially true when you have MS. So that is not the time to be shy so you should be asking for help, and you should take the help. You should maybe cook when you were still pregnant and you feel okay because when the first month you certainly don't feel like standing in the kitchen and making OMS friendly food, things like this. Kind of like prepare yourself as much as you can and ask questions. Like, I think I did ask a lot of questions, when I am looking back.

Ingrid Adelsberger (28m 39s):

And I said, like, there are so many things that I didn't ask questions about. So, OMS taught me to not believe anything or anybody, but do research for myself and [inaudible]. And so that's what I did with pregnancy too and I have a partner that is exactly the same way. So, we read up and we talked to people and we asked questions. And that is definitely something that I would say is really important that you are a hundred percent there. You know, because sometimes I feel like the kids run, they run on the side, right? You have your career, and you have your partnership and you have your hobbies and stuff, this and that.

Ingrid Adelsberger (29m 20s):

But for us it's like, I say, like, because we are family, right. So, my husband and I, we really, we were there and we researched a lot and we still do, and we make many changes in our lifestyle because we want to be there for our daughter. And I think that is hopefully wonderful for her, that we breastfed.

Geoff Allix (29m 44s):

Okay. With that. Thank you very much for joining us, Ingrid.

Ingrid Adelsberger (29m 54s):

Thank you for having me.

Geoff Allix (29m 54s):

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Geoff Allix (30m 40s):

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