

S4E46b Transcript

Coffee Break #27 with Vickie Hadge

Geoff Allix (10s):

Welcome to Living Well with MS Coffee Break, a part of the Overcoming MS podcast family made for people with multiple sclerosis interested in making healthy lifestyle choices and celebrating its 10th year of serving the MS community. I'm your host, Geoff Allix. Today, you'll meet someone living with MS from our diverse and global Overcoming MS community. Our Coffee Break series invites you into the lives of each guest. They share their personal MS journeys and speak openly about their challenges and victories, large and small. We hope you find some common cause and a source of inspiration from the stories of these very special people. You can check out our show notes for more information and useful links.

Geoff Allix (52s):

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 or leave a review wherever you tune into our podcast. Finally, don't forget to subscribe to Living Well with MS on your favorite podcast platform so you never miss an episode. Get your favorite beverage ready and let's meet today's guest on Living Well with MS Coffee Break. For this episode of the Living Well with MS Coffee Break, I'd like to welcome back Vickie Hadge. Vickie serves as the Ambassador of the OMS Circle in Connecticut, USA. She was officially diagnosed with MS in 2017 but had her first discernible symptoms in 2011.

Geoff Allix (1m 33s):

She lives well with her MS by following the OMS program and encourages others to do so through her OMS Circle. Vickie has been running her own Virtual Assistant company since 2003 and enjoys working with her global clients. She is active in her community, serving on the board of an education foundation and volunteering at her church on several committees. She recently completed a whole-food plant-based certificate from eCornell and enjoys cooking new and delicious plant-based delicacies for her family and friends. Vickie, welcome back to the podcast, and thank you for joining us again. You were a guest on season two of the podcast, way back a couple of years ago, discussing OMS Circles and community building. Now, we'd like to get to know you a bit better as you're a vital part of the growing global OMS community.

Geoff Allix (2m 18s):

To start off with, could you tell our audience a bit about yourself and your MS Journey?

Vickie Hadge (2m 24s):

Thanks so much for having me back, Geoff. It's my pleasure. Sure, I live in Connecticut in the Northeast United States. I started my MS journey way back in 2006. I initially had some foot drop issues, but I wasn't diagnosed at that time. They really weren't sure. They wanted to keep an eye on me, but it definitely got my attention. I started paying closer attention to my health, eating more vegetarian, doing yoga, and meditating. This is all before OMS came into existence. Then back about 10 years later, I started having more symptoms and went back to the doctor and took about a year from that point to get diagnosed.

Vickie Hadge (3m 8s):

I was officially diagnosed in 2017 and I have been living well with MS since.

Geoff Allix (3m 18s):

When did you discover OMS?

Vickie Hadge (3m 21s):

Actually, I discovered it just prior to my diagnosis. I think like many MS patients, I had a feeling what my diagnosis would be. It was in the realm of discussion with the doctors as they're trying to figure out what was going on. I found OMS just prior to my diagnosis so when I got diagnosed, it was really easy to jump right in and start implementing changes into my diet lifestyle to make myself even healthier.

Geoff Allix (3m 50s):

You were already a vegetarian?

Vickie Hadge (3m 52s):

I was vegetarian when I started and had been for some time, but then when I looked into the research from OMS, all the evidence behind it, I switched over to completely vegan. Since then, I have gone over to whole food, plant-based so no more vegan junk food.

Geoff Allix (4m 10s):

Yes, I think that's a key thing, actually, the word whole food, because I've been an unhealthy vegetarian in the past. You can eat really junk food, can't you? There's stuff now that I don't know.

Vickie Hadge (4m 27s):

Yes, you can. All the chips, the crisps, the donuts, Oreo is making an all vegan cookie, but not very healthy.

Geoff Allix (4m 34s):

I don't know about you in the States, but probably the same. We've got the, I won't call them out, but the two leading manufacturers of burgers, let's say, now have vegan versions of the leading famous burgers. I'm fairly sure that they're not very healthy.

Vickie Hadge (4m 59s):

Yes, to be sure. Lots of chemicals, lots of artificial flavors, lots of not-so-healthy fats.

Geoff Allix (5m 11s):

Yes. You're currently serving as the Ambassador of the OMS Circle in Connecticut. Firstly, how is that and how has that helped? How have you managed that? The OMS Circles are regional communities of people following OMS. Obviously in the pandemic, that's been difficult because, traditionally, people would have met up and seen each other. How have you managed over the pandemic and how has having a community helped during the pandemic?

Vickie Hadge (5m 47s):

Excellent question. I think the pandemic caught us all off guard. We went into lockdown pretty quickly. Our group, initially, when the pandemic started, I think, we really wanted to stay in touch with each other. We were very concerned about what was going on and what was happening in the world, especially since we had pre-existing conditions. When the pandemic lockdown started, we started with weekly meetings, whereas previously, we were doing monthly meetings. We did weekly meetings via Zoom. Everybody's an expert in Zoom now. It was really helpful for the entire group, me included, to talk about what was happening with the pandemic, our concerns with our conditions, and maybe the disease-modifying treatments that we are on.

Vickie Hadge (6m 36s):

It was really helpful to have that connection with other OMSers and have that support. We've since gone down to monthly meetings again, and also, still really important, we're still meeting via Zoom. We still like to connect with each other, but we did have some fun this summer where we were able to meet outside when it was safe. We had some really nice meetings outside. One was at a local vineyard. They had live music and we brought healthy snacks to share with one another. It was really great to see everybody face-to-face during the outside meetings.

Geoff Allix (7m 11s):

Well, yes. We have one coming up actually where I live. The MS center is doing a tryout for their oxygen therapy and the OMS Circle works at the MS center. She said they're already set up for socially distance, COVID safe, and everything so we're actually going to have a few of us go there, but it is strange. There are quite a lot of people in my Circle who I've never physically met, but we have a really active WhatsApp group, and we chat a lot. I think we communicate an awful lot more because it's virtual than we did before where we met maybe monthly physically.

Geoff Allix (7m 54s):

Now, we actually have daily chats happening and it's quite active. It's actually increased our communication rather than decreased.

Vickie Hadge (8m 3s):

That's wonderful.

Geoff Allix (8m 4s):

The other thing that has changed is that you now do some work for the OMS charity going from your work as being a virtual assistant. Could you share some information about that?

Vickie Hadge (8m 20s):

Sure. I've been a virtual assistant for almost 20 years. I have been working virtually long before the pandemic. I started working with OMS this year, and I'm very excited to be part of the team. I'm providing some support directly to Grazina Berry, the CEO, and Dowshan Humzah, who is the new chair of the board. It's really exciting to help them with the plans coming up for 2022 and the 10-year anniversary of OMS. I also work within the broader team. I help support meetings and do documentation. It's really exciting to work with them.

Vickie Hadge (9m 3s):

This is a whole other new community.

Geoff Allix (9m 6s):

You already are a member of the community, but now you're both members of the community and working there as well. How has that changed?

Vickie Hadge (9m 15s):

Yes, it's been pretty exciting. It's like looking behind the curtain and seeing the inner workings. I have to say, before I started working with OMS, how impressed I was with the organization, and now, being on the inside, seeing how it all comes together, and seeing all the people that it takes to make this happen, their dedication, the planning, and the supports that they put in place for OMSers is just wonderful. It's so nice to see a team working together, celebrating living well with MS, and doing what it takes to live well with MS.

Geoff Allix (9m 58s):

I've met quite a lot of the people before during the podcast who became more involved. You could easily just think that OMS has a new book every few years and does some retreats. Really, is there anything else going on? Then you realize there is an awful lot. All the research and there's communication with different health bodies in different countries. There are huge amounts going on.

Vickie Hadge (10m 25s):

Yes. I know that this year they're starting to work with healthcare providers and working directly with the healthcare providers to get more information out there. It's exciting to see the changes that are coming and all the programs that they're implementing coming up.

Geoff Allix (10m 46s):

Outside of work, could you give us a bit more of an insight about who you are by talking a little bit about your passions and hobbies?

Vickie Hadge (10m 55s):

Sure. I live at home with my husband, and I have two grown children and two grandchildren. The pandemic has changed our lives like everybody's a lot. One of the things that we changed during the pandemic is we've been hiking and taking walks in the woods a lot more this year. It's really added a lot to stress reduction in my life, and I just love being out there in the woods. I have found a fascination with mushrooms. I have noticed them on my walks, and I

started photographing them with my phone. It is amazing the variety of mushrooms and now I'm almost drawn to them every time we go out for a walk.

Vickie Hadge (11m 39s):

They come in all different shapes, colors, and sizes. I have taken pictures of purple mushrooms, black mushrooms, and orange mushrooms. They're just fascinating. I started researching a little bit about them. They're not an animal and they're not a vegetable. They're their own classification. I just find them fascinating and fun. That's one of the benefits of the pandemic and changes in our life this past couple of years.

Geoff Allix (12m 7s):

Yes. I'm incredibly thankful that I live in a rural area. I can't imagine if we moved from the middle of London to a very rural area many years ago, 17 or 19 years ago. If we'd still been in London with all lockdowns, I think we really would have been stuck inside an apartment and being somewhere rural where you can go out and about in lockdown. It was really nice, so I feel sorry for the people who are in cities, apologies, but it's all improving, hopefully.

Geoff Allix (12m 51s):

You mentioned mushrooms. You're a passionate food lover and you've just completed a special certification. What could you tell our listeners about personal discoveries that you've made learning about food, specifically, OMS-compliant food?

Vickie Hadge (13m 10s):

Sure, yes. I decided to really focus on plant based when I started OMS because I was vegetarian before. Recently, I got a certificate in plant-based nutrition from eCornell, and I learned so much. As we were discussing earlier, vegan food can be healthier or not healthy. Everything that we consume is going to contribute to our health or lack thereof, and I learned so much about nutrition and getting the most nutrient-dense foods that I could into my diet. In learning that, I also became a little braver in the kitchen. I have learned to experiment a lot more with foods and combining foods, and maybe going off the recipe a little bit saying, "Hey, this would be a lot better if I added some dark leafy greens to it so I could up the nutritional content."

Vickie Hadge (14m 4s):

I even eat my oatmeal with greens now. I've put greens and marinara sauce on my oatmeal and it's a really nice savory breakfast as opposed to a sweet breakfast.

Geoff Allix (14m 19s):

Could you give our listeners a tip then of how they could improve their diet?

Vickie Hadge (14m 26s):

Yes. One tip is dark leafy greens. They are the most nutrient-dense foods that we can consume. I try to do it at least three times a day. I mentioned the oatmeal. You can do fruit smoothies, have salad. Add greens to anything that you're cooking, whether it's a super stew or a sauce. Dark green leafy vegetables also include the vegetables like broccoli and broccoli sprouts. Broccoli sprouts are the most nutrient-dense food that we can eat. If you like sprouts, eat broccoli sprouts. Also, focus on omega-3 rich foods. OMS lets us know that it's important to have that good balance of omega 3s to omega 6 fats in our diet.

Vickie Hadge (15m 15s):

There are a lot of omega-3 rich foods like Brussel sprouts, walnuts, broccoli, kidney beans, wild rice, flax seeds, chia seeds, and hemp hearts. Sprinkle some chia seeds in your smoothie or have some hemp hearts on your salads. They're really nutrition powerhouses.

Geoff Allix (15m 33s):

Another thing asking for a bit of advice, we have a tradition on the Coffee Break to ask if there's any advice from your experience that you could give, particularly to people who are new to following OMS that would help them start their OMS journey?

Vickie Hadge (15m 50s):

Yes, I think one of the important things is to start where you are. Right where you are. "Here I am. I'm going to make steps today to make changes, to recommit to living well." I think we're just into the new year now as we're recording this, and this is a great time to do some self-evaluation. "Where are you on your seven steps of the program and where can you make tweaks to adjust maybe a little?" Add some more dark green leafies, get rid of the processed foods. Focus a bit more on maybe stress reduction, adding daily meditation or walking meditation.

Vickie Hadge (16m 29s):

We talked about walking and how relaxing that can be and stress reducing that can be. Another thing is don't expect changes in one week. This is going to take a long time. I think Dr. Jelinek said, "Envision it as a large boat. You can't turn it around on a dime. It's going to be slow to turn. Once it turns and gets through that turn, it can take off in a new direction." Stick with the program, keep making changes, and look for support on the OMS website and through OMS Circles.

Geoff Allix (17m 8s):

I think that's the problem, isn't it? We've become accustomed as a society to instant things. You have a headache; you take a tablet and then it goes away. Even to the point now, my kids hate it if there's something that comes out weekly on television, which is rarer and rarer but there are still some things on Netflix that are released weekly. They can't believe that this is how we used to watch television. They're like, "What? You waited a week between episodes?" "Yes, that's what happened because it was on schedule." Now, everything's instant. I think that's the problem with healthcare is that people just expect that I take a tablet, or I have a treatment, and then that's it.

Geoff Allix (17m 49s):

It will instantly make a change. When you say, "Well, this could be six months, at least, maybe even a couple of years for you to get better," then they start to lose faith and they think, "Well, I tried it for two months. It didn't really do anything."

Vickie Hadge (18m 6s):

Right, exactly. It does take time. I try to think of it as building muscles in the gym. If I go to the gym once and lift weights, I don't have big muscles, but if I go consistently and work at it and try a little bit harder each time, then the muscles will come, and it takes time.

Geoff Allix (18m 21s):

Yes. Okay, thank you very much for that. Thank you so much for joining us on this episode of Living Well with MS Coffee Break. I hope that you have a wonderful 2022.

Vickie Hadge (18m 28s):

Thank you. My pleasure. I hope you have a great year as well.

Geoff Allix (19m 28s):

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