



Coronation Street Q&A

MS Storyline

What is Coronation Street's new MS storyline?

Coronation Street has introduced a new storyline where a main character, Johnny Connor, will be diagnosed with relapsing MS. In April, we started seeing Johnny experiencing symptoms such as vision problems, hand tremors and difficulties with balance and mobility.

Johnny's diagnosis will be revealed after a GP referral to a neurologist and an MRI scan. On 14 June Johnny will confess to his daughter Kate that he has MS. The episode will air on ITV at 7:30pm.

The storyline is embargoed until 9pm on 14 June – which means it's confidential and we aren't allowed to speak about it publicly until that time.

Who is Johnny Connor?

Johnny, aged 62 and played by Richard Hawley, is the father of Carla, Aidan and Kate Connor. Johnny's been on Corrie since October 2015 and is now a regular character. He manages the local factory 'Underworld' with Aidan, and is engaged to Jenny Bradley, who also works at the factory. Johnny and Jenny's wedding will be in July.

What happens in the episode on 14 June?

In May, Johnny's daughter Kate urged him to medical advice about the various symptoms he had been experiencing. His GP referred him to a neurologist, suspecting MS or Parkinson's, and Johnny went for an MRI scan. On 12 June Johnny returns from his neurologist appointment and lies to Kate, saying he just has a bacterial infection. Johnny also breaks off his engagement with Jenny, claiming he doesn't love her anymore.

On 14 June Kate demands to know why Johnny broke up with Jenny, not believing that he's stopped loving her. Johnny admits he has MS, and confides his fears to Kate – about being a burden on Jenny, and what the future might hold for him.

Johnny tries to make Kate promise to keep his diagnosis a secret and they get into a fight over this. After he throws Kate out of his flat, Johnny's legs go dead and he collapses. He bangs his head as he falls and is knocked unconscious.



Isn't it rare for people to be diagnosed with relapsing MS at such a late age?

It's not typical – but also not unheard of – for people to be diagnosed with relapsing MS later in life. MS is usually diagnosed between the ages of 20 and 40, although it can occur at any age.

We provided information and advice to Corrie's production team about this, but ultimately it's the producers and scriptwriters who decide how the storyline will play out. We were pleased to see a line added to the script acknowledging it's not common to be diagnosed at Johnny's age.

The MS Society's involvement

Has the MS Society been working with Coronation Street on this storyline?

Yes. The MS Society has been providing the researchers and script writers with information about MS. While we don't have control over how they use our information, our feedback has helped shape the storyline to better reflect the reality of living with MS. Ultimately it's the producers and scriptwriters who decide how the storyline will play out.

Why has the MS Society been helping with this storyline?

We were contacted by the production team about the story and agreed to get involved. We felt it was a great opportunity to raise awareness of MS amongst the millions of people who tune into watch Coronation Street every week.

We also wanted to provide accurate information about MS, so we were keen to be involved to ensure the show reflects how the condition really affects people with MS and their families and friends. We've consistently provided information, advice and feedback on scripts, but ultimately it's the producers and scriptwriters who decide how the storyline will play out.

The storyline/Johnny's portrayal of MS is unrealistic. Why didn't the MS Society make sure they were shown realistically?

Events depicted in TV soaps can be more dramatic and move along much more quickly than in real life.

The MS Society has continuously provided Coronation Street with accurate information about MS and its symptoms as well as fed back on scripts. We've also introduced the scriptwriters to people with MS who have shared their own



experiences of the condition, as well as MS specialists. But in the end, it's up to Coronation Street to decide how they use our information and what's shown on screen.

Why wasn't the MS Society or the MS helpline mentioned in the show?

We asked if this could happen but we were told that ITV must follow strict rules on promoting organisations on the programme, so we weren't able to include details within the episodes themselves.

However, following the 'reveal' episode a voiceover will direct people to ITV's Advice webpage, which will feature information about our Helpline and website.

Isn't it exploitative/unethical to be using an MS diagnosis as entertainment?

We understand that it may be upsetting for some people to see an MS diagnosis, and the emotions of it, played out in a TV soap. But we think by depicting MS to such a wide audience, this provides a great opportunity to raise awareness and educate people who might not know much about the condition. We think many people in the MS Community will be able to relate to Johnny and his family's experience, and we were keen to get involved to help make sure the storyline was accurately and sensitively portrayed.

Diagnosis

What should I do if I think I have MS?

We encourage anyone who's worried about symptoms to visit their GP. They may be able to rule out some other possible causes of your symptoms. While GPs can't diagnose MS, if they suspect you may have MS they'll refer you to a neurologist who can.

I've been diagnosed with MS and I'm finding it really difficult, who can I talk to?

Being told that you have MS can have a huge emotional impact and involve a number of feelings from anger and denial to depression. The important thing to remember is that you're not alone.

We'd encourage anyone with MS, their families, friends and carers to contact the MS Society's free and confidential helpline – 0808 800 8000 – for information and support.



I've think I have MS, but my doctor keeps dismissing my symptoms. Is there anything I can do?

It can be stressful repeatedly going back to your doctor with unexplained symptoms and you may be made to feel that you are wasting their time and resources. But if symptoms are affecting you, you are entitled to help from the health and social care profession.

If you're not happy about what your doctor is saying, you can ask for a second opinion. You can find more information about how to do this on the NHS website or NHS Inform in Scotland.

My doctor thinks I may have MS, but unlike Johnny, I have to wait to see a neurologist, what can I do?

We know that getting an MS diagnosis can be a really frustrating process. And while Johnny was quick to see a specialist because everything moves more quickly in the world of TV, we know that getting a formal diagnosis can take several months and often even longer.

When your GP refers you to see a specialist, you can choose the hospital but waiting times can vary.

If you've already booked your appointment and you've been waiting longer than 18 weeks, you can complain to the hospital or provider. Ask them for details of how to make a complaint. This can be different depending on which nation you live in.

Like Johnny, I don't want to tell anyone about my diagnosis. How can I deal with this?

Telling people that you have MS can be a very difficult thing to do. Accepting the diagnosis yourself is hard, let alone having to break the news to others.

There is no reason why you should feel pressured to tell everyone you know that you have MS. Your health is a personal thing, and only you will know how you want to handle things. However, if people are aware of your condition and how it affects you then they may be better placed to offer their support if and when you need it.

There's no right or wrong way or time to tell your family and friends you have MS. Our website has tips about some of the things you might like to consider when telling family and friends, and how to deal with their reactions – see more [here](#).



There's also lots of information on our website about talking to your employer – see more [here](#).

We have a free and confidential Helpline that can provide support and information to anyone affected by MS in the UK – 0808 800 8000.

I'm worried about my friend/family member, who has MS, what should I do?

Living with an unpredictable and complex condition can be really difficult. If you're worried about someone's wellbeing and you feel you can, offer support and encourage them to talk about how they're feeling. You could also try suggesting they speak to their GP or MS nurse, or get in touch with our helpline on 0808 800 8000.

Additional questions

What will happen next in the show?

We can't say...as with all these storylines, they don't give anything away publicly in advance. You'll need to keep watching the show for updates on what happens with Johnny.

General comments about having different experiences to Johnny

MS is a very variable condition that's different for everyone. So it's likely that your experiences of symptoms, route to diagnosis or how family and friends have reacted to your condition may differ from Johnny's.

How do I join the MS Society's campaigns community?

You can get updates on our campaigns and important policy issues related to MS by signing up to our campaigns community [on our website](#).

Select the 'Get Involved' tab on the home page. On the 'Campaign' page you'll find a link to 'Join our team', where you can enter your contact details.