



EVEN AT 5FT 4IN MIA FARROW IS SOMEHOW TALLER than one expects, as she greets you at her sprawling 200-year-old farmhouse, overlooking its own lake, and set in 60 acres of glorious Connecticut countryside. The low-beamed ceilings, the book-lined walls, the patina of old wood, the English country garden that she and her children planted themselves, all point to someone for whom family and roots are central to who she is. The refectory table in the dining room is long enough to seat her large family, both the children she adopted and her own four offspring.

But Mia, in jeans and a pink sweater, with her blonde, wavy hair tumbling around her delicate face, is even more ethereal-looking in person than she is in her films. Her fragile frame dates from her bout with polio at age nine, one year before the first vaccine against the disease was developed in 1955, although polio was still infecting people in the West until 1979.

"I was so underweight, the family dubbed me 'mouse,'" she says. "After polio, I was forever being measured to make sure I was growing properly, which if you compare me with my siblings and parents, I wasn't. I'm much smaller than any of them."

Now, like many polio survivors, Mia, 60 this year, lives with the spectre that post-polio syndrome, or PPS, could rob her of the good health she's enjoyed since her childhood recovery. "Post-polio is a threat to so many people, yet many doctors don't know that people can be revisited by polio when they reach middle age, or any time after," says Mia. "Many of the same symptoms you had initially can return. People who are walking can end up

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back in braces, people in braces can end up back in a wheelchair, those who are going to work may not be able to do so anymore because of fatigue and weakness."

PPS is triggered by decades of what is known as "overuse abuse". Virtually every muscle in the body is affected by polio, as are neurons that keep the brain awake and focus attention. The polio virus damages 95% of brain stem and spinal cord motor neurons, killing on average at least half of them. The surviving neurons are now failing and dying from overuse, triggering post-polio syndrome symptoms.

There are an estimated 350,000 polio survivors in Britain and nearly three million Europeans; about 70% of those who experienced paralytic polio and 40% who had non-paralytic polio, as did Mia, are experiencing PPS, according to Richard Bruno, PhD, who chairs the International Post-Polio Task Force.

"It's why I don't exercise," says Mia. "And it's why I tell my son, Thaddeus, not to. I know I could develop post-polio syndrome. I try not to dwell on it." Thaddeus is her adopted son from India and, like Mia, a polio survivor, but unlike her, he is paralysed in both legs.

"People who've had polio are supposed to take special care of themselves," says Mia. "And this I do. I've told Thaddeus also, but he's too young, at 15, to really appreciate what that means. He thinks because his upper body is very strong from using his canes and the chair, that he's fine. But he needs to know not to overdo it.

"The main thing we polio survivors have to remember is to ward off exhaustion, conserve energy, get the rest we need. Not to exercise, or over-exert. We can't try to ▶

Mama Mia

Motherhood is a way of life for the actress Mia Farrow, who adopted 10 children as well as giving birth to four of her own.

But as she explains to **Jan Goodwin**, her childhood was blighted by polio – an experience that filled her with fighting spirit