

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

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What Is Multiple Sclerosis?

Multiple sclerosis is a progressive, chronic disease that affects the central nervous system. It causes the immune system to attack cells in the brain, spinal cord, and optic nerves. It is important to diagnose and treat multiple sclerosis early to prevent relapse, delay disease progression, and maximize quality of life.

Doctors don't know for sure what causes multiple sclerosis, but it is most likely a combination of environmental and genetic factors. It affects women more than men.

What Are the Symptoms?

Symptoms differ depending on where the nerve cells are damaged. Symptoms may come and go, or they may be permanent. They can include:

- Changes in vision (1 eye more common than both eyes)
- Muscle weakness
- Fatigue
- Loss of balance or trouble with coordination
- Tremors, numbness, or slurred speech
- Partial or total paralysis
- Thinking or memory problems
- Frequent urge to urinate

Many patients with multiple sclerosis experience "flares" or "relapses" when symptoms suddenly get worse or new ones appear and last more than 24 hours.

How Is It Diagnosed?

- No single test is available to diagnose multiple sclerosis. Your doctor will ask about your medical history, do a physical examination, and run a combination of other tests.
- Blood tests may show signs of other illnesses that cause symptoms similar to those of multiple sclerosis.
- Magnetic resonance imaging is essential for diagnosis. It takes a detailed picture of your brain and spinal cord, where lesions that suggest multiple sclerosis may be present.
- More specialized testing may be needed if the diagnosis is unclear.



How Is It Treated?

- You and your neurologist will come up with a treatment plan that is best for you based on the type of multiple sclerosis you have.
- Early treatment with immunotherapy is very important and has been shown to lower risk for relapse, disease progression, and development of new lesions in many patients.
- A multidisciplinary approach to care that includes nondrug therapies (physical, occupational, and speech therapy) and symptom management (pain, muscle stiffness and spasms, fatigue, and bladder problems) may help preserve function and quality of life.
- Steroids, such as prednisone, can reduce nerve inflammation during a relapse or flare.
- Low levels of vitamin D are common in patients with multiple sclerosis and are associated with increased risk for relapse. You may be instructed to take a vitamin D supplement.
- Lifestyle changes, including a healthy diet, being physically active, and getting enough sleep, may also help symptoms.

Questions for My Doctor

- What kind of multiple sclerosis do I have?
- What can I do to manage my symptoms?
- Will my symptoms get worse over time?
- What treatments are available to me?
- What are the risks and side effects of the treatment?
- How often should I have follow-up visits?

For More Information



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MedlinePlus

<https://medlineplus.gov/multiplesclerosis.html>

National Multiple Sclerosis Society

www.nationalmssociety.org/What-is-MS