

+ Neurology



Multiple sclerosis



Multiple sclerosis (MS) is an autoimmune disease. Our immune system was built to attack anything foreign that has entered our body—while not attacking the body itself. In an autoimmune disease, the immune system mistakenly attacks its own body. With MS, the immune system attacks the myelin sheaths of the nerves.

Symptoms

Symptoms of MS vary depending on which areas of the brain and spinal cord are affected. The first symptoms of MS often affect the eyes, causing blurred or double vision. Other early symptoms of MS include weak, stiff muscles with painful muscle spasms; tingling or numbness; clumsiness; difficulty maintaining balance when walking; bladder control problems; and lasting dizziness. Later in the disease, MS may cause mental or physical fatigue; changes in ability to concentrate; mood changes; and difficulty making decisions, planning, or prioritizing.

What are the causes of MS

The causes are not known. Different possibilities are considered:

Virus infection: A virus (a pathogen) that occurs only in a moderate climate could be the cause. The warmer the country, the less it appears to occur.

Nutrition and hygiene: MS appears to be especially prevalent in highly developed countries. People also have certain hygienic facilities and eat certain foods. It could therefore be that these conditions also play a part in MS.

Heredity: MS is not hereditary. Still, it occurs more often in the closest family of people with MS. It may be that hereditary factors play a small role.

The body has an immune system that cures substances that can cause diseases, for example bacteria or viruses. It is the case that an immune system attacks and breaks down substances of their own body. This is called a hypersensitivity disease or autoimmune disease. MS seems such a disease because the body attacks the myelin sheath.

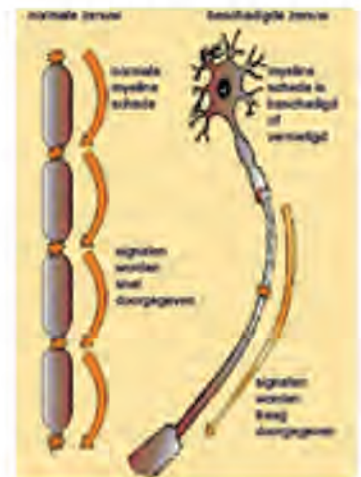
Combination Multiple Sclerosis may also be caused by a combination of these options.

Most people living with MS only experience a few of these symptoms.

Diagnosing MS

There is no one test to diagnose MS. If your symptoms suggest MS, your doctor will perform tests to confirm or rule out the diagnosis.

MRI scan: The MRI will check for inflammation and destruction of the myelin sheath in your brain and spinal cord. This test provides important information, but is not definitive. Nerve damage appearing on an MRI may not be caused by MS. And an MRI scan may not show right away if you have MS. Sometimes, doctors will not diagnose MS until they see how symptoms or test results change over time.



Lumbar puncture: A long needle is inserted into the space under the spinal cord in order to extract a small amount of cerebrospinal fluid. This liquid is being tested for abnormalities.

Bloodtests: The blood is examined extensively for signs of inflammation.

Evoked potentials: The conduction of impulses by specific neural pathways is measured. Electrodes are applied to the skin. After administering electrical stimuli, the result is measured. The form and time of the answer provide important information.

MS can follow one of several different patterns:

Relapsing remitting MS. Symptoms come and go. There are relapses (episodes when symptoms suddenly get worse), followed by remissions (periods of recovery). Relapses can last for days to weeks. Between relapses, patients usually feel close to normal. This is the most common type of MS.

Secondary progressive MS: About half of people with relapsing remitting MS eventually enter a secondary phase. Nerve function declines gradually but steadily.

Primary progressive MS: Symptoms worsen gradually and continuously from the start, without periods of relapse or remission.

Progressive relapsing MS: Symptoms steadily worsen. Periodic improvements occur, but relapses later leave patients in worse condition.

Treating MS

There is no cure for MS, but treatments do exist. These are divided into two groups. One type suppresses the disease. The other improves specific symptoms of MS.

Treatments that suppress the disease include:

Steroids. These are the primary treatment for MS relapses. They shorten the length of MS relapses and may speed up recovery from an attack.

Interferons: Interferons are a type of protein. They reduce the frequency of relapses and reduce the duration and severity of attacks when they do occur. Interferons also slow the worsening of symptoms. Glatiramer acetate. This drug blocks cells that damage myelin. It may also reduce the frequency of relapses.

Monoclonal antibodies: These drugs reduce the frequency of attacks. Rarely, they can trigger a potentially fatal brain disease.

Your doctor may also prescribe medications to treat specific symptoms of MS. For example, treatments can improve the following: vision problems, tremor, pain, muscle tightness and spasms, fatigue, depression, bladder dysfunction, and neurological symptoms such as seizures.

Other Therapies

Depending on your symptoms, you may benefit from some combination of physical therapy, occupational therapy, and speech therapy. Physical therapists can help by designing a program of stretching and strengthening exercises to help you improve your strength, balance, and coordination. These therapists can also help you learn to use assistive devices like a cane, scooter, or wheelchair.

Occupational therapists will help with daily living skills so that you can be safe and independent at home and at work. They can help you adapt your home or work environment to make it easier for you to dress, bathe, cook, etc.

Speech therapists can help you learn to communicate clearly and swallow safely because MS can affect control over the muscles you use to talk and eat.

What to Expect

MS is a progressive illness, which means it will get worse over time. Fortunately, in most people, MS progresses slowly. The severity of symptoms and how quickly they worsen vary from person to person and by the type of MS. Some people experience mild symptoms. In others, MS can make it difficult or impossible to speak, write, or walk.

Taking Care of Yourself

You can do several things to keep yourself feeling as well as possible. Stay cool. People with MS often become more sensitive to heat. As a result, the smallest change in body temperature can increase MS symptoms.

Diet and nutrition.

Rest: MS causes fatigue. Make sure to get enough rest.

Manage stress: Stress can increase or worsen MS symptoms. Learn relaxation techniques, such as meditation, progressive muscle relaxation, deep breathing, tai chi, or yoga.

Exercise: Regular exercise can help fend off fatigue and depression. It can help improve your strength, balance, coordination, and overall health and well-being. Ask your doctor how often you should exercise and at what intensity.



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