



**National
Multiple Sclerosis
Society**
Northern California
Chapter

Multiple Sclerosis Facts

What is multiple sclerosis?

Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a chronic, often disabling disease of the central nervous system. MS can cause blurred vision, loss of balance, poor coordination, slurred speech, tremors, numbness, extreme fatigue, problems with memory and concentration, paralysis, and blindness. The progress, severity and specific symptoms in any one person cannot yet be predicted, but advances in research and treatment give hope to those affected by MS.

Who gets MS?

Anyone may develop MS, but there are some patterns:

- Most people with MS are diagnosed between the ages of 20 and 50.
- Two-thirds of people with MS are women.
- Studies indicate that genetic factors make certain individuals more susceptible than others, but there is no evidence that MS is directly inherited.
- MS occurs in most ethnic groups, including African-Americans, Asians and Hispanics/Latinos, but is more common in Caucasians of northern European ancestry. However some ethnic groups, such as the Inuit, Aborigines and Maoris, have few if any documented cases of MS regardless of where they live.
- MS is more common at northern latitudes that are farther from the equator and less common in areas closer to the equator.

How many people have MS?

Because it is not contagious, which would require U.S. physicians to report new cases, and because symptoms can be completely invisible, the numbers are estimated.

- More than 400,000 Americans have MS.
- More than 20,000 people are living with MS in Northern California, and over 35,000 state-wide.
- Every week about 200 people are diagnosed.
- Worldwide, MS may affect 2.5 million individuals.

What are the typical symptoms of MS?

- Symptoms of MS are unpredictable and vary from person to person and from time to time in the same person. For example: one person may experience abnormal fatigue, while another might have severe vision problems.
- A person with MS could have loss of balance and muscle coordination making walking difficult; another person could have slurred speech, tremors, stiffness, and bladder problems.
- In severe MS, people have partial or complete paralysis on a permanent basis.

Can MS be cured?

Not yet. However, there are now FDA-approved medications that have been shown to modify or slow down the underlying course of MS.

- Many therapeutic and technological advances are helping people manage symptoms and lead productive lives.
- Advances in treating and understanding MS are made every year and progress in research to find a cure is very encouraging.

How does the National MS Society help?

- Supports more MS research, offers more services for people with MS, provides more professional education programs and furthers more MS advocacy efforts than any other MS organization in the world.
- Since its founding in 1946, the Society has committed has invested \$600 million in MS research.
- Through its fifty-state network of chapters, assistance is provided to over a million people annually, including people with MS, their family members, employers and caregivers.

For more information, visit www.msconnection.org or call 1-800-344-4867