



**National
Multiple Sclerosis
Society**

MS Symptoms and Progression

Although there are many common MS symptoms, no two people experience them the same way. This may be because the location of damage in the central nervous system affects how different people experience symptoms. Even when there are no symptoms, damage may be taking place. That's why it's important to stay on a prescription therapy if you have MS.

Vision

Optic neuritis causes visual problems in 70% of all people with MS. It may cause blurred vision or pain over a few days. After initial symptoms, there is gradual improvement, sometimes after several weeks. People with MS may experience double-vision and other visual symptoms as well.

Movement

Often, multiple sclerosis is active on the nerve fibers that control muscle movement. Many people with MS lose muscular strength in the arms and legs as the disease progresses. Damage from MS can also result in poor balance or coordination.

Sensory

People with MS may sometimes feel numbness or tingling, burning or cold in parts of the body. There can also be pain in different parts of the body, including the face. MS may cause extra strain in the back and leg muscles, or extra tension, known as "spasticity."

Bladder/Bowel

Many people with multiple sclerosis will develop trouble controlling the urge to urinate or will be unable to completely empty the bladder. They may also experience problems with bowel control or constipation.

Sexual Activity

Having multiple sclerosis can lead to problems related to sexual activity. Men with multiple sclerosis can find it difficult to achieve or maintain an erection. For women, MS often causes a loss of sexual sensitivity, pain during intercourse, an inability to achieve an orgasm, or a reduction in naturally produced lubrication.

Fatigue

Many people with MS experience fatigue or tiredness. Since fatigue is a natural part of life, it can be difficult to connect with MS at first. However, fatigue from MS can often last for a few months, during which energy is used up every day with just a little exertion.



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Cognition and Mood

MS can have mental function symptoms such as memory lapses and slowed thinking. People with MS may also have difficulty concentrating.

Many people with multiple sclerosis experience periods of depression. Sometimes it is linked directly to physical changes in the brain caused by multiple sclerosis. Understandably, it may also be an emotional reaction to having the illness and learning to cope with the symptoms and the challenges they represent. If you are experiencing feelings or symptoms of depression or hopelessness, discuss them with your healthcare provider because treatment for depression is available.

MS Progression

Since no two people experience MS in the same way, the progression of MS symptoms may look very different from one person to another. However, even when there are no symptoms, there is progression of damage to the central nervous system over time. In addition, the brain can compensate for some level of damage, so symptoms may be hidden for quite some time. That's why it's important to begin MS treatment as soon as possible after receiving a diagnosis.

Some important points about MS symptoms:

- Some symptoms may occur often, others more rarely.
- Some symptoms may appear early in the course of MS, others later.

People with MS can still feel perfectly healthy, even though their MS is causing damage. Like an iceberg, the true progression of MS can lie concealed beneath the surface.

General MS Progression

The long-term accumulation of progression-related MS symptoms can profoundly affect the physical and mental aspects of daily living. After diagnosis, people with MS may experience sensory symptoms such as numbness, tingling, or visual loss. Early in MS progression, they may find that they recover completely from relapses, and have few relapses in their first years after diagnosis. It is also common early on in the disease to experience long intervals between relapses. Later, as MS progresses, people may have difficulty with tremors, coordination, and walking. They may find that their relapses become more frequent, and that they are less able to recover from them.



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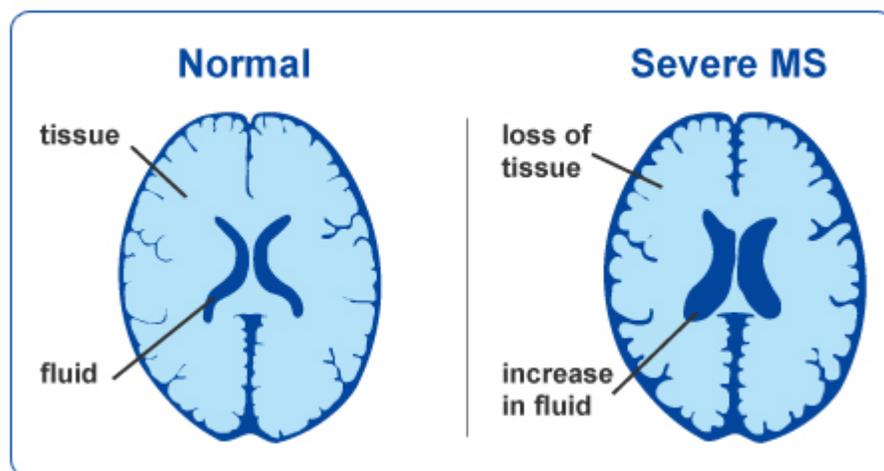


Changes in Mobility

Since MS causes fatigue, balance problems, and weakness, many people find it difficult at some point to walk on their own. However, most people with MS remain able to walk, even if it's with a cane or crutches. Although some people with MS may frequently use a scooter or wheelchair, others may use them at times to help conserve their energy.

MS Progression and Disability

The natural course of MS can result in a condition known as brain shrinkage (brain atrophy). It is a condition in which you actually lose brain tissue. Treatment may protect you against brain shrinkage.



To figure out if disease is progressing, doctors use a scale called the Expanded Disability Status Scale (EDSS). The EDSS is a way of measuring physical disability. Two-thirds of people with MS do not progress past level 6.

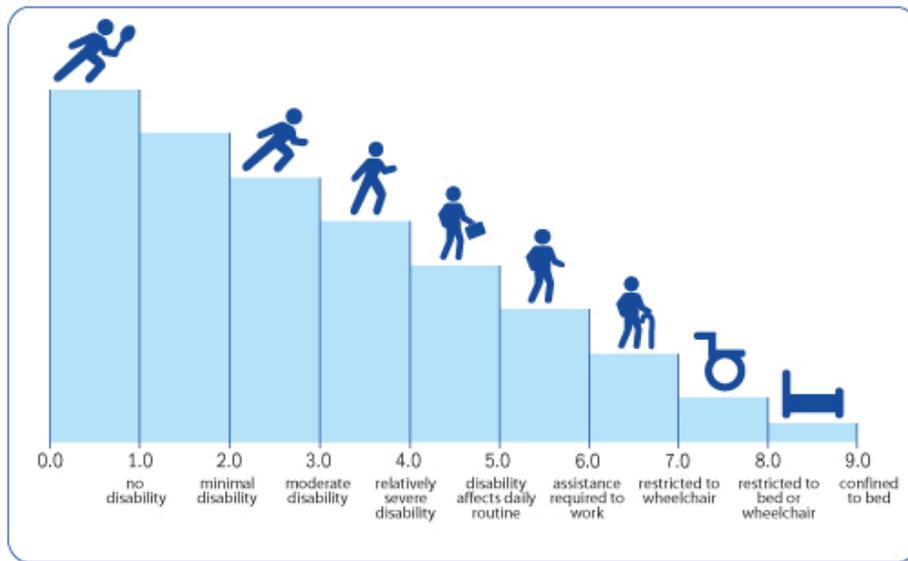


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MS and Your Future

This chart shows the data from a study that followed people with MS for 12 years. The number of flare-ups a person had in the first two years of their disease affected the number of years before a person would need a cane to walk. Those with fewer flare-ups enjoyed more years of greater independence.



In fact, even one additional relapse in the first two years of MS may put a patient at risk for faster progression to an EDSS score of 6.0. That's one of the reasons it's so important to take the most effective MS therapy for you as soon as possible.

