

## The Power of Connection

An African proverb says, “When spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion.” This illustrates the power of connection to face life-changing challenges such as MS. You don’t have to deal with MS on your own. Begin building your “web” of support with your doctor and health-care team, family and friends, faith leaders, peer support groups and others.

## Taking Charge of Your MS

Call 1-800-344-4867 and an MS Navigator® can provide you with expert advice to:

- Learn what you need to know when you or a loved one is newly diagnosed
- Identify appropriate treatment options and symptom management strategies
- Connect to resources in your community, including healthcare professionals experienced with MS
- Meet workplace challenges
- Understand benefits such as health insurance
- Face financial challenges
- Find support when MS progresses

*This resource was printed with grant funding from the Medtronic Foundation*

## African American Council

The National MS Society mobilizes people and resources to drive research for a cure and to address the challenges of everyone affected by MS. To support this mission, the Society established the National African American Advisory Council — which advises on the best approaches to reaching and engaging the African American community.

Learn more about the National African American Advisory Council:  
**[nationalMSsociety.org/African-AmericansandMS](http://nationalMSsociety.org/African-AmericansandMS)**

**MS STOPS PEOPLE FROM MOVING.  
WE EXIST TO MAKE  
SURE IT DOESN'T.  
JOIN THE MOVEMENT®**

**[nationalMSsociety.org](http://nationalMSsociety.org)  
[MSconnection.org](http://MSconnection.org)**

**For Information:  
1 800 344 4867**

© 2012 National MS Society

BR0085

# African Americans & Multiple Sclerosis

GENERAL INFORMATION



**MS**®

**National  
Multiple Sclerosis  
Society**

Jackie, diagnosed in 1997



Judy, diagnosed in 1982

## What is MS?

Multiple sclerosis (MS), an unpredictable, often disabling disease of the central nervous system (CNS), interrupts the flow of information within the brain, and between the brain and the body. The exact cause of MS is currently unknown, but it is associated with inflammation and degeneration within the CNS.

### Symptoms

Symptoms of MS are unpredictable. They can vary from person to person, and from time to time in the same person. Common symptoms of MS include: fatigue, numbness, difficulty walking or maintaining balance, changes in sexual function, vision problems, problems with memory and thinking, and depression.

### Diagnosis

Physicians use several strategies to diagnose MS. These include a careful review of medical history, a neurological examination, and various tests including magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), evoked potentials (EP), and spinal fluid analysis. Physicians must find evidence of damage that has occurred in at least two separate areas of the CNS at different points in time, and that cannot be explained by other causes.

### African Americans and MS

*The myth that African Americans do not get MS is just that — a myth. African Americans do get MS.* In fact, studies suggest that MS can be especially active in African Americans.

- African Americans are more likely to experience more relapses
- African Americans are more likely to experience greater disability
- African Americans have a greater risk of progressing to require ambulatory assistance earlier
- African Americans are more likely to develop involvement of the optic nerves and spinal cord (optico-spinal MS) and inflammation of the spinal cord (transverse myelitis)

### Treatment

Researchers are working hard to find a cure for MS. Today, the treatment of MS includes medications to modify the disease course, treat relapses, and manage symptoms, as well as strategies to improve function and safety, and provide emotional support. These medications and strategies can enhance the quality of life for people living with MS.

All evidence indicates the earlier individuals begin treatment, the more promising their long-term health outcomes are likely to be.

*Work with your doctor to find the right treatment options to help you manage the disease and move your life forward.*

### Healthy Living

Individuals living with MS are not immune to other health issues, so a healthy lifestyle is critical to living well with MS. Healthy nutrition, proper exercise, getting enough sleep, managing stress, a strong support network, and an active social life are all important to living well with MS.