Choosing a Healthcare Provider
A complex disease requires a comprehensive approach

Comprehensive MS care involves the expertise of many different healthcare professionals — each contributing in a unique way to the management of the disease and the symptoms it can cause. Sometimes this team works within a single center, called a Center for Comprehensive Care, offering you “one-stop shopping”. More often, you are referred by your MS healthcare provider to other specialists in the community. In either case, the goal is comprehensive, coordinated care.

Providers with MS knowledge and expertise

The National MS Society’s Partners in MS Care program includes a variety of health care providers and Centers for Comprehensive Care that provide coordinated multi-disciplinary MS care. Partners in MS Care are healthcare providers — neurologists, physical therapists and long-term care providers — who have demonstrated knowledge and expertise in treating patients with MS.

To locate a healthcare provider in your area, including Partners in MS Care, visit nationalMSsociety.org/FDR or connect to an MS Navigator at 1-800-344-4867.
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Researching healthcare providers

MS is a life-long disease, which makes it critical for you to feel comfortable with your MS healthcare providers and work in partnership with them. When searching for an MS provider, it’s helpful to know some of the credentials and understand the roles of the comprehensive care team members.

While you’re researching providers, think about what’s important to you and consider the following:

- How long has the provider been treating MS?
- Does he/she have specialized training in MS?
- Does he/she also do MS research?
- Does the provider take your insurance?
- How far is the provider from your home or work?
Gathering information

You may not be able to find all the information you need to select a healthcare provider other than calling. In addition to the questions above, you might also want to ask:

- What percentage of this provider’s time is spent seeing patients with MS compared to patients with other conditions?
- If you need a referral for other services, for example, care for bladder infections, help with emotional challenges, or a driving evaluation, can this provider refer you to others with the appropriate expertise?
- Is there someone on staff, perhaps a nurse, who can help coordinate your care, such as referrals to other providers, orders for lab work or MRIs, and communicate the results back to you?
- Is the office accessible?
- Are there opportunities to participate in MS research?
- What do you need to bring or send in prior to the first appointment?
During your first visit

These indicators may help you decide if the provider is a good fit:

- If you brought someone with you, did the provider welcome your companion(s)?
- What happens when you ask for an explanation of a medical term or an unfamiliar concept?
- Does the provider involve you in the decisions about your care, like which medication you will use?
- Does the provider allow you to record, take notes or give you a written summary of your visit?
- Do you feel comfortable with this provider?

You may want to ask:

- If your provider is not available, who helps with urgent matters like new symptoms?
- Will you see that same provider for follow-up visits or will you see someone else in the practice, like the nurse practitioner or physician assistant?
- What are the provider’s feelings about lifestyle choices, like diet and exercise?

Advocate for yourself

If you feel rushed, uncomfortable or the provider does not explain things in a way you understand, trust your instincts. You may also find a second opinion valuable when making difficult decisions, like selecting a treatment. The bottom line is you have a right to be assertive and advocate for yourself.
The National Multiple Sclerosis Society is proud to be a source of information about multiple sclerosis. Our comments are based on professional advice, published experience and expert opinion, but do not represent individual therapeutic recommendations or prescriptions. For specific information and advice, consult your physician.

Early and ongoing treatment with an FDA- approved therapy can make a difference for people with multiple sclerosis. Learn about your options by talking to your healthcare professional and contacting the Society at nationalMSsociety.org or 1-800-344-4867.

The Society publishes many other resources about various aspects of MS. Visit nationalMSsociety.org/brochures or call 1-800-344-4867.
The Society mobilizes people and resources so that everyone affected by multiple sclerosis can live their best lives as we stop MS in its tracks, restore what has been lost and end MS forever. Last year, the Society invested $60 million in MS research with more than 340 active projects around the world. Through its comprehensive nationwide network of services, the Society is focused on helping those affected by MS connect to the people, information and resources needed to live their best lives. We are united in our collective power to do something about MS now and end this disease forever. Learn more at nationalMSsociety.org.