



Diagnosis and Treatment of MS

Making the MS Diagnosis: There is no specific diagnostic test for MS. To make a diagnosis, there must be evidence of damage in at least two separate areas of the central nervous system (CNS) and evidence that the areas of damage occurred at two different points in time. Also, other possible diagnoses must be excluded. The tools for making the diagnosis include:

- **Complete medical history** to identify evidence of past neurological events
- **Neurological exam** to look for signs of a CNS process
- **Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI)** of the brain and spinal cord to identify evidence of past damage and/or active inflammation
- **Blood tests** to consider other possible diagnoses as a cause of the symptoms
- **Lumbar puncture (spinal tap)** to identify evidence of an abnormal immune activity
- **Evoked potential testing** to look for slowing of electrical conduction of nerve signals in the CNS

Treating MS - Comprehensive MS care

- **Modifying the disease course.** Initiation of treatment with one of the FDA approved disease-modifying medications can reduce the number and severity of relapses, the accumulation of damage in the CNS, and slow the accumulation of disability that can occur over time.
- **Treating relapses.** A relapse is the appearance of new or worsening neurological symptoms that lasts at least 24 hrs. and is caused by inflammation in the CNS. Relapses may be treated with high-dose steroids to help accelerate recovery.
- **Managing symptoms.** A combination of lifestyle modification, rehabilitation and medications is used to optimally manage symptoms.
- **Rehabilitation.** Physical therapists, occupational therapists, speech/language pathologists and others focus on promoting independence, accessibility and safety, functional mobility, exercise, energy conservation, speech and swallowing and other functions.
- **Providing emotional support.** Mental health professionals provide education and support, diagnose and treat mood changes, and diagnose and treat cognitive changes.
- **Healthy Lifestyle.** Regular physical activity, stopping smoking, limited alcohol, healthy diet and reducing the risk of other conditions such as obesity, high blood pressure, cardiac disease and diabetes

This information is made possible through a collaboration between the VA MS Centers of Excellence and the National MS Society, www.nationalmssociety.org