

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

A chronic disorder that affects the central nervous system (brain, spinal cord, and optic nerve). Multiple sclerosis (MS) more often affects adults 20 to 50, and women twice as often as men. MS types include:

- Relapsing-remitting. Most common. Patients have flare ups followed by partial or complete recovery.
- Primary-progressive. Slow and continued worsening of symptoms. May be temporary minor improvements.
- Secondary-progressive. This type follows the relapsing-remitting type. Symptoms steadily worsen.
- Progressive-relapsing. Symptoms steadily worsen from the start. Has flare ups, with or without recovery.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Signs and symptoms may be mild, moderate, or severe. They vary from person to person and at times in the same person.
- Fatigue (called MS lassitude)
- Problems with walking. Lack of coordination.
- Bowel and bladder problems.
- Vision problems or hearing problems (less often).
- Vague loss of sensation or numbness and tingling.
- Mood swings and depression.
- Sexual problems.
- Difficulty with memory, concentration, attention, and problem solving.
- Speech or swallowing problems (sometimes).

CAUSES

Unknown. It is believed to be an autoimmune disorder. In these disorders, the immune system attacks the body itself by mistake and in different ways. Genetic and environmental (such as a virus) factors may contribute.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Females more than males.
- People of Northern European descent.
- Family history of MS.
- Growing up in a cold climate (compared to tropical).

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

Cannot be prevented at present.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Multiple sclerosis is incurable. The course of the disorder will be different for each person. Some will be favorable and others unfavorable. Symptoms can often be relieved or controlled.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

Numerous complications can occur. They often result from problems such as immobility, chronic urinary-tract infections, difficulty with swallowing and breathing, and mental and emotional disorders.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider will do a physical exam and ask questions about your symptoms, activities, and medical history. No specific test is available to diagnose MS. Medical tests may include blood, urine, and spinal fluid studies. An MRI scan of the brain and spinal cord will usually show typical changes that indicate MS. Often, a specialist called a neurologist is needed to make the diagnosis.
- Treatment may include one or more drugs to treat symptoms, prevent complications, or slow progression of the disorder. Physical therapy may be recommended. Plasma exchange (a blood treatment) may be of help.
- Multiple sclerosis will affect every aspect of your life. You will need to educate yourself about your specific symptoms and what to expect and how to adjust to the disease. The more you can learn, the better able you will be to cope with the changes in your life.
- Counseling may be helpful for you and your family.
- Joining a support group is a way to share feelings.
- To learn more: National Multiple Sclerosis Society, 733 Third Ave., New York, NY 10017, (800) 344-4867; website: www.nationalmssociety.org.

MEDICATIONS

- Drugs called disease-modifying agents are often prescribed. The options will be discussed with you.
- Cortisone drugs may be prescribed for inflammation.
- Drugs for symptoms will be prescribed as needed.

ACTIVITY

Get enough rest. Exercise to the extent possible. It helps physical and emotional well-being. It keeps muscles limber and strong, and helps balance and coordination.

DIET

Eat a healthy diet that is high in fiber to prevent constipation.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of multiple sclerosis.
- After diagnosis, any symptoms cause you concern.

Special notes:

More notes on the back of this page