

# MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a disease of the central nervous system that affects the brain, spinal cord and optic nerve. It destroys myelin, which protects nerve cells. This leads to a disruption of messages between the brain and the body, as well as hindering or blocking the flow of information within the brain.

The disease usually shows up between the ages of 20 and 40. As many as 2.3 million people worldwide have MS, which afflicts two to three times more women than men.

## SYMPTOMS

MS is unpredictable. There can be periods where the disease flares up, followed by recovery periods when symptoms might disappear completely. Symptoms of MS vary from patient to patient. They include:

- Vision problems (such as double vision, blurry vision or loss of vision).
- Fatigue.
- Muscle weakness.
- Trouble with coordination and balance.
- Sensations such as numbness or prickling, or a “pins and needles” feeling.
- Thinking and memory problems.
- Loss of bowel or bladder control.

## CAUSES

It's not known what causes MS, although researchers say it might result from environmental or genetic factors; viruses or

bacteria also might be to blame. MS is not hereditary, but having a parent or sibling with MS greatly increases a person's chance of developing the disease. Studies are exploring links between MS and a lack of vitamin D, and smoking also might increase risk.

## DIAGNOSIS

MS can be difficult to diagnose because its symptoms are similar to those of other nervous-system disorders. Your healthcare provider might ask about your medical history and try to rule out other causes for your symptoms. Blood testing, neurological testing that measures the level of electrical activity in the brain, and a spinal tap to evaluate spinal fluid all might be done. Additionally, magnetic resonance imaging might show lesions created by MS.

## TREATMENT

MS is not curable, and the patient and doctor must work together to determine the best course of treatment to manage the disease. Your doctor might prescribe one of the oral, injectable or infused drugs approved by the FDA to treat MS. Relapses might be treated with corticosteroids

## RESOURCES

National Multiple Sclerosis Society  
[www.nationalmssociety.org](http://www.nationalmssociety.org)

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke  
[www.ninds.nih.gov](http://www.ninds.nih.gov)