

Multiple Sclerosis

Multiple sclerosis (MS) is an unpredictable and often debilitating disease of the central nervous system, affecting the brain, spinal cord, or optic nerves. By damaging the myelin sheath (a fatty material that surrounds and protects your nerve cells), MS slows down or blocks messages between your brain and your body, leading to symptoms that can include:

- Visual disturbances
- Muscle weakness
- Trouble with coordination and balance
- Tiredness and depression
- Sensations such as numbness, prickling, or “pins and needles”
- Thinking and memory problems
- Sexual difficulties

MS usually affects women more than men, and often begins between the ages of 20 and 40. Often, the disease is mild, but some patients can lose their ability to write, speak, or walk.

What Causes MS?

We don't know for certain what causes MS, but several things seem to make the disease more likely. People with certain genes may have higher chances of getting it. Smoking also may raise the risk.

Some people may get MS after they've had a viral infection that makes their immune system stop working normally. The infection may trigger the disease or cause relapses. Scientists are studying the link between viruses and MS, but they don't have a clear answer yet.

Some studies suggest that vitamin D, which you can get from sunlight, may strengthen your immune system and protect you from MS. Some people with higher chances of getting the disease who move to sunnier regions seem to lower their risk.

Getting a Diagnosis

There is no single test for MS. Doctors use a medical history, physical exam, neurological exam, MRI, and other tests to diagnose it. While there is no cure for MS, certain medicines, as well as physical and occupational therapy, may help to control its symptoms.

MS is difficult to diagnose, because its symptoms can be the same as many other nerve disorders. If you have any of the symptoms, your general practice physician will refer you to a neurologist, who will look for signs of nerve damage in your brain, spinal cord, and optic nerves.

**If you are facing a medical diagnosis or treatment decision,
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