



Multiple Sclerosis

What is Multiple Sclerosis?

Multiple sclerosis (**MS**) is a life-long disease with symptoms that come and go. It often starts in young adults. Women are more likely to have it than men. MS affects our body's defense system (called "immune system"). Usually, the defense system fights germs to keep us healthy. During an MS attack, the person's defense system damages nerve cells. The portion of the nerve cells injured is called "myelin". Myelin is the protective covering of the nerve. It allows messages to go quickly back and forth from the brain, the spinal cord, and the rest of the body. MS damages myelin in the brain and spinal cord. This damage causes the symptoms of MS.

What are the symptoms of MS?

Not all people with MS have the same symptoms. Symptoms of an MS attack often start suddenly. They may get worse over a few days. These symptoms can last for a few weeks before they begin to get better. Heat can make MS symptoms worse. The common symptoms are:

- Problems with vision: such as blurred or double vision. For example, a change in ability to see reds and greens, or blindness in one or both eyes.
- Muscle weakness: causing problems with balance or with moving arms and legs.
- Strange sensations: feeling numbness, "pins and needles", pain, or loss of feeling.
- Problems with thinking: difficulties paying attention, remembering, and making decisions. About half of people with MS have thinking problem but these problems are usually mild.
- Feeling tired, sad, or unable to control emotions.
- Men may have problems with erection and ejaculation.
- Women can still get pregnant. Pregnancy may affect the duration between MS attacks.
- People may develop bladder control problems.

Is there any treatment?

There is no cure for MS but there is treatment to:

- reduce the symptoms of MS attacks
- improve recovery from MS attacks
- prevent or lessen the number of MS attacks
- shorten the length of MS attacks
- improve abilities to handle MS attacks

There are medications used to help reduce fatigue, pain, muscle tightness, and improve bladder control problems.



Will I get better?

Most people with MS are mildly affected. In the worst cases, MS can take away a person's ability to write, speak, or walk. Rehabilitation therapies can improve recovery from MS attacks.

What research is being done?

Scientists are trying to answer the question, "Why does the body's natural defense system attack the myelin of nerve cells and cause MS?" New medicines are being tested. It is hopeful there will one day be a cure.

Disclaimer: Information presented on this page is for specific health education purposes only. Persons should consult qualified health professionals regarding specific medical concerns or treatment. Each clinician caring for the patient is responsible for determining the most appropriate care.

Provided as a courtesy by:

Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center Medical Consumer Health Information Program

7601 E. Imperial Highway • Downey, CA 90242

1-877 RANCHO-1 • FAX: (562) 402-6690 • Please visit us at <http://www.rancho.org>

ESD0043MultipleSclerosis.doc 01/25/05