

Multiple Sclerosis

Did you know Multiple Sclerosis is at least two to three times more common in women than in men?

What is Multiple Sclerosis (MS)?

Multiple Sclerosis (MS) is a chronic autoimmune disease of the central nervous system. An autoimmune disease occurs when the body's immune system attacks normal, healthy tissues. In a healthy individual, the immune system produces proteins called antibodies to protect against viruses and bacteria. However, in someone with MS, the immune system produces autoantibodies that cannot distinguish between healthy tissues and foreign pathogens. These autoantibodies destroy the fatty substance called myelin that coats and protects nerve fibers in the brain and spinal cord. Damage to the myelin sheath results in multiple lesions and scars, which is where the disease gets its name—Multiple Sclerosis, derived from “multiple scarring.” Nerve fibers play an essential role by sending signals to and from the brain. When the protective layer of these fibers is damaged, nerve signals or impulses slow down or stop, causing neurological problems such as vision loss, muscle weakness, muscle spasms, loss of coordination, and changes in sensation.



What causes Multiple Sclerosis?

The main cause of the disease is still unknown. However, research suggests that MS may be triggered by a combination of environmental and genetic factors. These can include:

- There is no direct link between MS and a specific gene; however, individuals with a family member or relative with MS are more likely to develop the disease.
- Lack of sunlight or low vitamin D levels may play a role, as the disease is more prevalent in countries far from the equator.
- Lifestyle habits, such as smoking, increase the likelihood of developing the disease.
- Infectious agents, such as viruses and bacteria, may cause the immune system to malfunction, potentially leading to MS.
- Females are more likely to develop MS than males.

Symptoms

Although symptoms may differ from person to person, some common symptoms associated with damage to the myelin include:

- Electric shock sensations in the neck, which occur with certain neck movements, such as bending it forward.
- Weakness or numbness in limbs, typically occurring on one side of the body.



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- Lack of coordination or tremors.

Other symptoms include:

- Blurry vision or vision loss.
- Slurred speech.
- Tingling or pain in various parts of the body.

Treatment

Currently, there is no cure for Multiple Sclerosis. Treatment focuses on recovery from attacks, easing symptoms, and slowing the progression of the disease.

How to Support Friends and Family with Multiple Sclerosis

- Treat them normally, as you always have.
- Refrain from suggesting “cures” found on the internet.
- Ask how they are doing every couple of months.
- Offer help with tasks and chores that might be difficult for them to complete.
- Educate yourself about the disease by using online resources, reading books, or asking questions.

