



What Is Multiple Sclerosis?

Multiple Sclerosis, or MS, is a long-lasting disease that can affect your brain, spinal cord, and the optic nerves in your eyes. It can cause problems with vision, balance, muscle control, and other basic body functions.

The effects are often different for everyone who has the disease. Some people have mild symptoms and don't need treatment. Others will have trouble getting around and doing daily tasks. MS happens when your immune system attacks a fatty material called myelin, which wraps around your nerve fibers to protect them. Without this outer shell, your nerves become damaged.

The damage means your brain can't send signals through your body correctly. Your nerves also don't work as they should to help you move and feel. As a result, you may have symptoms like:

- Trouble walking
- Feeling tired
- Muscle weakness or spasms
- Blurred or double vision
- Numbness and tingling
- Poor bladder or bowel control
- Pain
- Depression
- Problems focusing or remembering

The first symptoms often start between ages 20 and 40. Most people with MS have attacks, also called relapses, when the condition gets noticeably worse. They're usually followed by times of recovery when symptoms improve. For other people, the disease continues to get worse over time.

What causes MS

Doctors don't know for sure what causes MS, but there are many things that 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 -- like the Epstein-Barr virus or the human herpesvirus 6 -- 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 the answer.

Treatment

There is no cure for MS right now, but a number of treatments can improve how you feel and keep your body working well. Your doctor can also prescribe drugs that may slow the course of the disease, ease your symptoms, or help you manage the stress that can come with the condition. Along with treatment, you can get regular exercise and avoid too much heat to boost your energy.

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