

Condition:



Multiple Sclerosis

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What is Multiple Sclerosis?

Multiple Sclerosis (MS) is an auto-immune condition meaning that your immune system which normally fights off infection, attacks healthy parts of your body namely your brain or spinal cord.

The central nervous system cells are covered in a protective layer a bit like the insulation on an electrical cable. In MS the immune system gets confused and instead of attacking an infection or virus, it turns on itself and attacks the nerve cells, damaging the protective layer, this is called demyelination. Sclerosis' means scarring. Demyelination causes scars or lesions in different places within the central nervous system.

There are three types of MS relapsing, primary progressive and secondary progressive which all have different prognosis.

Reference



Click here to watch this video about being diagnosed with MS **Video (link opens in new window)**

Multiple Sclerosis and work

When you have a diagnosis of MS and are thinking about working, it is important that you don't make any major decisions right away. Many people with MS continue to work without any major problems and others are able to keep the jobs they enjoy by making a few changes to the way they work. But the symptoms caused by MS can vary and fluctuate over time and this can be a challenge to manage at work. It is advisable to take your time and examine your situation from all angles, and then make the best decision for you. A change in duties or flexible working arrangements, which allow you to work in comfortable settings and pace your activities, can be helpful.

Some examples of work accommodations/adjustments and adaptive devices that could help with managing MS include:

- extra lighting or a stand magnifier at your work station to help with visual problems
- large-screen computer monitors or screen-reader programs
- scheduling changes to ease fatigue, help stress levels, or allow for medical appointments
- a more ergonomic or adjustable office chair
- a large-key keyboard or voice-recognition typing software
- scheduling tools to help you organise and remember tasks or appointments
- grab bars/rails in the restroom
- a rolling cart or wheelie suitcase to help carry files to meetings
- moving your work station closer to the restroom or break room
- more communication by telephone or email, rather than face-to-face meetings

Top tips to help manage your Multiple Sclerosis in the workplace

Travelling to work: Plan the most efficient way for you to get to work, how to travel, the distance and the best time to travel. If you are a car driver you may be eligible for a Blue Badge, if not discuss with your employer parking availability close to your place of work.

Take regular breaks. Fatigue can be a major issue with MS - make sure you factor in regular breaks within your working schedule. This includes during each working day and your annual leave.

Be realistic about what you can do. Some tasks may cause you discomfort so don't overdo it and let your line manager know any challenges you are facing.

Create a relapse plan. Dependent on your type of MS, you may have episodes of distinct relapse, when you develop new symptoms or old symptoms return. These can come on quite quickly, typically over a few days or possibly even a few hours. Discuss a plan with your line manager to manage work and relapses.

Practice techniques to manage your fatigue. The majority of people with MS experience fatigue at some point, so finding ways to manage this is crucial for managing at work:

- Exercise often
- Conserve your energy
- Stay cool

- Regulate your sleep
- Eat healthily
- Manage your stressors
- Manage your medications – speak to a GP or other health professional if you don't know how to do this

Take advantage of employer's resources and benefits. Your workplace may offer free initiatives to support with your health and wellbeing. This may include an Employee Assistance Program (EA) which can offer free confidential counselling or other support. Find out what is available to you

How do I know I have Multiple Sclerosis?

MS can cause a wide range of symptoms and there's no definitive list of early signs.

There's no typical pattern that applies to everyone - people can have different symptoms at different times.

Visible symptoms

loss of balance and dizziness
stiffness or spasms
tremor
speech problems
difficulty swallowing

Invisible symptoms

fatigue
pain
bladder / bowel trouble
vision problems
numbness or tingling in different parts of the body
muscle stiffness and spasms
problems with memory and thinking
mental health and emotions

What causes Multiple Sclerosis?

It is not yet certain why people develop MS, but research suggests that a combination of factors may be involved:

Your genes

MS isn't directly inherited, but people who are related to someone with the condition are more likely to develop it.

Lack of sunlight and vitamin D

May play a role in the condition, although it's not clear whether vitamin D supplements can help prevent MS.

Smoking

People who smoke are about twice as likely to develop MS compared to those who don't smoke.

Viral infections

Infections might trigger the immune system, leading to MS in some people.

Talking to your GP or another health care provider about Multiple Sclerosis

The early symptoms often have many other potential causes, so they do not necessarily indicate MS. A visual problem is one of the more obvious early symptoms. Keep a diary of the symptoms you have experienced and any specific pattern of symptoms to discuss your GP.

If your GP thinks you could have MS, you'll be referred to a neurologist (a specialist in conditions of the nervous system).

Treatments for Multiple Sclerosis

There's currently no cure for MS but it is possible to help treat the symptoms of MS, while other treatments control MS itself. With these treatments you may experience fewer and less serious relapses, and disability progression may slow down.

The treatment you need will depend on the specific symptoms and difficulties you have. It may include:

- Treating relapses with medication to speed up recovery
- Specific treatments for individual MS symptoms
- Treatment to reduce the number of relapses with medication

A team of healthcare professionals including a neurologist, a physiotherapist, specialist MS nurse and other professionals will explore with you the treatment that works.

Techniques to manage your Multiple Sclerosis

Creating a tool kit using different skills and tools can be helpful in successfully managing your MS.



Be active: Exercise

Regular activity and exercise is important for both general health and fitness. Research has shown the specific benefits of exercise for people with MS, include reduced fatigue, pain, improved strength, mobility, and bowel and bladder function.



[Click here](#) to watch a video on the benefits of exercise with MS



Take notice

Be mindful. Mindfulness is a practice on focusing on what is happening “now” in the present moment. When you’re mindful, you are aware of your thoughts without labelling them as being good or bad. It can help you to relax, manage negative thinking and conserve energy.



Keep learning: New hobbies

Having MS can cause you to give up certain hobbies or activities but ensure you find new things you can do. Through learning activities we meet new people and develop skills which can boost self-confidence and make us feel better.



Connect: Reduce social isolation

Phone a friend or family member and talk to them instead of sending a text and arrange to speak regularly. Meaningful relationships and connecting with others is crucial to our wellbeing.



Give back

Doing something nice for someone can help you feel better about yourself. Try committing an act of kindness once a week; give someone a compliment or ask how someone how they are feel, or volunteer your time to support others.



Pacing, prioritising & planning

Doing too much on your 'good' days, and less on your 'bad days' is not ideal for fatigue and pain. Prioritise doing the things that really matter to you by planning and pacing your activities.



Relaxation

Relaxation skills in addition to mindfulness can be helpful for reducing muscular tension. Relaxation techniques such as breathing techniques or doing something like reading a book/listening to music are helpful for many people.



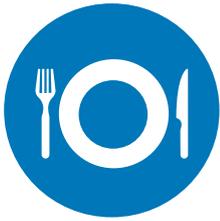
Sleep routine

This might involve identifying and treating other symptoms of MS that cause sleep problems — for example, urinary dysfunction. If all else fails, you might talk with your doctor about using sleep medications for a short period of time. Some other tips are removing any phone or screens as the blue light can impact your sleep. Have an aired room and create a relaxed atmosphere to sleep in.



Don't let your negative thoughts get the better of you

Pain and fatigue can have a negative impact on your thoughts, feelings and emotions. Learning to recognise when this is happening to your thoughts can help you to challenge them and change them.



Eat well

There's no special diet that has been proven to slow the progression of MS, but a generally healthy, balanced diet can help you manage specific problems such as fatigue and constipation. It can also reduce your risk of other health problems, such as heart disease.



Smoking cessation

It is never too late to stop smoking. Every smoke-free year decreases your risk of progression to a greater level of disability, and ex-smokers have the same risk of progression in MS as non-smokers.

Useful links

Reference



Click here to visit MS Society Helpline.
Website (link opens in new window)

Reference



Click here to visit MS-UK helpline.
Website (link opens in new window)

Reference



Click here to visit MS Trust.
Website (link opens in new window)

Helplines

MS Society

0808 800 8000

MS-UK

0800 783 05 18

MS Trust

0800 032 38 39

Apps that may help



My MS Manager