

Multiple Sclerosis Factsheet

Multiple Sclerosis (MS) is a progressive and unpredictable disease that affects the central nervous system, interrupting the transmission of nerve impulses throughout the brain, spinal cord and optic nerves.

The frequency and severity of MS attacks cannot be predicted. While some MS sufferers have regular attacks and steadily deteriorate into severe disability, others have few attacks or relapses and can remain symptom free for the rest of their lives.

The cause of MS is unknown and there is no cure, though treatments are available to ease symptoms and modify the course of the disease.

How the disease works

MS occurs when the protective sheath around the nerve fibres in the brain and spinal cord becomes damaged, causing scarring that distorts and interrupts the messages that are sent along the nerves.

This results in the impairment of a person's motor, sensory and cognitive functions, with varying degrees of severity.

'Sclerosis' means scar and the disease is labeled 'multiple' because the damage usually occurs at a number of points along the nerves.

Symptoms

As the central nervous system can be damaged in numerous different locations, the symptoms of MS vary from person to person. Some of the more common symptoms include:

- Blurred or double vision
- Numbness or pins and needles
- Extreme fatigue
- Loss of coordination and balance
- Hand tremors
- Loss of mobility
- Problems with or changes in memory functioning
- Speech difficulties or slurring

Types of MS

Although every individual diagnosed with MS will experience a different combination of symptoms, there are four distinctive patterns relating to the disease:

Relapsing-remitting MS

- Characterized by unpredictable relapses or attacks, where new symptoms appear or existing symptoms become more severe
- This can last for varying periods of time before there is partial or total recovery
- MS may be inactive for months or years.

Primary progressive MS

- Individuals experience no relapses but a gradual onset of disability, which does not recover or reverse

Secondary relapsing-remitting MS

- Occurs in individuals who started with relapsing-remitting MS, but then the relapses diminish in frequency or cease altogether
- However, there is progressive disability.

Relapsing-progressive MS

- Relapses occur, with disability accumulating between relapses

How can Just Better Care help?

- Working with the individual and their family to ensure support is tailored to their needs
- All levels of care from early diagnosis to advanced MS progression

References:

[Better Health Channel, Victorian State Government](#)
[MS Australia](#)