

Multiple Sclerosis Fact Sheet

Multiple sclerosis is a chronic, progressive disease of the central nervous system. Education about the disease can lead to better management of symptoms.

What causes MS?

The cause of MS is unknown. It is not contagious or shown to be directly inherited, but factors that may play a role include:

- **Gender:** Women are affected more than twice as often as men
- **Age:** Most people are diagnosed between the ages of 20 and 50
- **Geography:** Most people with MS live in temperate climates
- **Ethnic background:** Caucasians are at a higher risk

What are the warning signs?

Early symptoms of multiple sclerosis include:

- Weakness
- Tingling
- Numbness
- Blurred vision

Other possible warning signs are:

- Muscle stiffness
- Thinking/cognitive problems
- Urinary problems



What causes the symptoms?

It is believed that MS symptoms result when an immune system attack affects myelin, the protective insulation surrounding nerve fibers of the central nervous system.

Myelin is often compared to insulating material around an electrical wire; loss of myelin interferes with the transmission of nerve signals.

Myelin is destroyed and replaced by scars of hardened "sclerotic" tissue. Some underlying nerve fibers are permanently severed. The damage appears in multiple places within the central nervous system, giving the disease its name.

How is it diagnosed?

There is no single definitive diagnostic test for MS, but magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) is often helpful to confirm a suspected MS diagnosis.

In early MS, symptoms that might indicate any number of possible disorders can come and go. Some people have symptoms that are very difficult for physicians to interpret, and these people must often "wait and see."

Does MS always cause paralysis?

No. The majority of people with MS do not become severely physically disabled. Two-thirds of people living with MS remain able to walk, though many will need an aid.

Is MS fatal?

Most people living with MS have a normal or near-normal life expectancy. In rare cases however, MS is so malignantly progressive it is terminal.

Can MS be cured?

While no cure for MS has been found yet, several FDA-approved drugs are available for the long-term treatment of MS.

These drugs have been shown to:

- Reduce the number and severity of MS flare-ups
- Possibly delay disease progression

In addition, many therapeutic and technological advances are helping people manage symptoms.

With various adjustments made along the way, most individuals with MS may look forward to a fulfilling and productive lifetime.

A professional in-home caregiver experienced in MS care such as at **Continuum** can provide assistance with and/or tips and techniques for bathing, dressing, toileting, and safe transfers. Contact **Continuum** for more information on how our in-home caregivers can make a person with MS feel enabled, motivated and connected to others.

Source: National Multiple Sclerosis Society