



Understanding Multiple Sclerosis

Almost one million adults in the United States are living with multiple sclerosis.

1. Introduction

Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a disease in which the immune system attacks the protective myelin covering of nerve fibers, disrupting communication between the brain and body. The severity and pattern of symptoms vary widely, with some people experiencing long periods of remission while others have progressive loss of function. Although there is no cure, treatments can help manage symptoms, speed recovery from attacks, and slow disease progression.

2. Symptoms

Early symptoms of multiple sclerosis often involve changes in vision along with muscle weakness and numbness on one side of the face or body or below the waist. These early signs may be subtle or temporary, making them easy to overlook. Other MS symptoms vary widely and can include fatigue, dizziness, muscle stiffness or spasms, difficulty with balance and coordination, cognitive challenges, depression, and problems with bladder regulation or sexual function.

Because MS can affect any part of the central nervous system, symptoms differ from person to person and may fluctuate day to day.

3. Risk Factors

The exact cause of MS is unknown, though research suggests that certain factors can increase the risk.

- + Age
- + Gender
- + Family history
- + Smoking
- + Low levels of vitamin D
- + Exposure to certain viruses, such as Epstein-Barr or mononucleosis
- + Obesity

4. Treatment

Treatment for multiple sclerosis focuses on reducing relapse frequency, slowing disease progression, and managing day-to-day symptoms. Steroids may be used in the short term, and additional medications can help with issues like fatigue, muscle stiffness, pain, or cognitive symptoms. Supportive care often includes physical, occupational, or speech therapy, assistive mobility devices, vision aids and counseling. In some cases, plasma exchange may be used during severe attacks, and clinical trials can offer access to new treatment options.

Did you know?

Multiple sclerosis symptoms can intensify with heat or during infections.

For more information on MS, please visit [mayoclinic.org](https://www.mayoclinic.org).

References:

<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/17248-multiple-sclerosis>

<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/multiple-sclerosis>

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