



Knowledge Brochure Series

MS & SYMPTOM MANAGEMENT



Identifying your multiple sclerosis (MS) symptoms¹

A chronic disease like MS can cause a number of different symptoms—and spotting yours is the first step in developing a plan to manage them.

Some symptoms people with MS commonly experience include

- Depression
- Cognitive difficulties
- Heat and temperature sensitivity²
- Sexual dysfunction
- Bowel/bladder dysfunction
- Spasticity
- Pain

If you notice any symptoms you may think are associated with your MS, contact your health care team.

Managing depression^{3,4}

The onset or worsening of depression is a common experience for many people with MS. Although depression is different for everyone, there are things you can do to help manage its effects. Signs of clinical depression may include sadness, irritability, loss of interest in everyday activities, and thoughts of death or suicide, among others.

Talk to your doctor about ways to help manage your depression, such as

- Exercising⁴
Remember: Always consult your doctor before beginning an exercise regimen.
- Reaching out to your support network
- Staying active and involved in the community⁴
—Being around others may help you feel more positive and energized
- Taking medication as prescribed by your doctor³

Keep track of your emotional state. If you notice prolonged or particularly strong feelings of depression, contact your doctor immediately.⁴

Managing cognitive difficulties⁵

Because MS is a neurological disorder, cognitive difficulties are relatively common. Some of these cognitive difficulties may include a change in thinking, reasoning, analyzing, decision making, concentration, memory, and following the flow of information.

Stay sharp by keeping your mind active and challenged with:

- Memory games, puzzles, and crosswords
- Reading
- Writing in a journal or diary

Stay organized by:

- Making daily “to-do” lists
- Creating schedules and reminder notifications



Managing heat and temperature sensitivity²

Changes in temperature can affect people with MS differently. Extreme hot or cold temperatures can trigger a worsening of symptoms. Even small rises in temperature (like a hot shower or too much sun) can trigger symptoms.

Help keep your temperature stable—and your symptoms at bay—by

- Seeking out air-conditioned spaces
- Drinking plenty of fluids, especially if you are feeling hot
- Relaxing in a pool that is cooler than 85°F
- Wearing appropriate clothing for the temperature: lightweight, loose clothing for warmer weather, and gloves, scarves, and earmuffs in chillier climates
- Checking and preparing for the climate at your destination if you are traveling or moving
- Warming up with a sweater, blanket, or cup of tea

Temperature-related symptoms are usually temporary and tend to disappear when you return to your normal body temperature.

Managing sexual dysfunction⁶

Sexual dysfunction can be difficult to acknowledge and discuss, but it is a common symptom for many people with MS. Surveys of people with MS suggest that as many as 91% of men and 72% of women may experience sexual difficulties at some point during the course of their disease.

For men, this may manifest itself as difficulty achieving or maintaining an erection, reduced sensation, and difficulty ejaculating. Women typically report reduced or painfully heightened sensation in the vaginal or clitoral area and vaginal dryness.

There are many effective ways to manage your sexual dysfunction, including

- Open and honest communication with your partner
- The use of medications or suppositories (as prescribed by your doctor)
- Exploring alternative means of sexual stimulation
- Use of water-soluble personal lubricants

Don't be afraid to bring up sensitive topics like sexual dysfunction with your health care team. They can offer suggestions and prescribe treatments that may help.

Managing bowel and bladder dysfunction

If you experience frequent or urgent urination, incontinence, incomplete urination, or a weak stream, you may be suffering from bladder dysfunction. Bowel dysfunction involves constipation or diarrhea.⁷⁻⁹

To help manage bladder function^{7,8}

- Drink water regularly
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol
- Plan fluid intake
- Drink cranberry juice daily
- Wear absorbent pads to help your peace of mind

To help manage bowel function⁹

Constipation:

- Exercise
Remember: Always consult your doctor before beginning an exercise regimen.
- Schedule a regular time to go
- Drink 8 to 12 glasses of fluids daily
- Eat fiber
- Use stool softeners and fiber supplements as directed by your doctor

Diarrhea:

- Cut back on caffeine and alcohol
- Take bulk-forming fiber supplements as directed by your doctor



Managing spasticity¹⁰

Spasticity is defined as sudden muscle stiffness or contractions. This symptom varies widely between people who experience it and can be difficult to assess. Because spasticity flares up intermittently, you may not always feel its effects. Spasticity most often occurs in the legs but can appear in your arms as well.

About 80% of people with MS experience spasticity, which can range from mild discomfort to more serious pain and immobility. If you do experience spasticity, talk to your doctor about developing a treatment plan—improvement is usually possible.

You can combat spasticity by

- Exercising
Remember: Always consult your doctor before beginning an exercise regimen.
- Speaking with your doctor about potential medications
- Working with a physical or occupational therapist
- Altering your daily activities to avoid triggers like cold temperatures or poor posture
- Engaging in relaxation techniques like yoga, meditation, or massage

Managing pain

For some patients, pain is an unfortunate symptom of MS.¹¹ Pain can either be acute or chronic. Acute pain is often characterized by flare-ups of burning or stabbing feelings in the face or neck, while chronic pain is more continuous and is sometimes associated with spasticity.¹¹

It is important to remember that there are strategies and therapies you can employ to combat it. Together with your health care team, you can develop a safe and effective pain-management routine.

Managing your pain is a multidisciplinary process

- Some nonmedical strategies you may find useful include¹¹
 - Meditation and other holistic strategies
 - Staying socially active
- Medications you and your doctor may want to consider include¹²
 - Antidepressants
 - Analgesics
 - Antiepileptics
 - Topical agents
 - Opioids
 - Interventional procedures

Remember: Only take medication as prescribed by your doctor.

Work together to manage your MS symptoms

With the right support, you can proactively manage your symptoms

While this brochure contains many tips and strategies to help manage your MS symptoms, remember that symptom management starts with an open and honest conversation with your doctor. The more your health care team knows, the better they can help. Together, you and your support networks can work out a plan to take control of your symptoms.

Address issues as they arise to take an active role in managing your MS symptoms.

Trust in the experience of Shared Solutions®

While there's no substitute for medical advice from your doctor, **Shared Solutions®** is here to help if you have questions about MS-related issues or need therapy support. **Shared Solutions®** is a comprehensive network of free resources available to people with MS, CarePartners, friends, family, and anyone else who has been touched by MS. Contact **Shared Solutions®** at **1-800-887-8100** or online at **www.sharesolutions.com**.

The following websites provide additional MS-related information:

- National Multiple Sclerosis Society: **www.nmss.org**
- Multiple Sclerosis Association of America: **www.msaa.com**
- Caregiver Action Network: **www.caregiveraction.org**
- MS Connection: **www.msconnection.org**



**Call 1-800-887-8100
or visit www.sharedsolutions.com
to learn more.**

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