

Multiple Sclerosis

Definition

Multiple sclerosis is an inflammatory, autoimmune disorder of the nervous system that affects the brain and/or the spinal cord.

What causes it?

Exactly what causes multiple sclerosis is not clear. There are genetic (familial) predispositions to it and exposure to certain microorganisms seems to contribute to the immune dysfunction. Diet, vitamin D deficiency and other factors seem also to play a role.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms vary widely, depending on the location and severity of the affection. Imbalance, fatigue, weakness, tremors, numbness and visual difficulties could occur. This could be transient in many patients, but some people with severe cases may lose the ability to walk or speak. Multiple sclerosis can be difficult to diagnose early in the course of the disease because symptoms often come and go, sometimes disappearing for extended periods of time.

How is it diagnosed?

The doctor will obtain a detailed history of your symptoms which should help him or her suspect the condition. A neurological examination also provides important clues. An MRI of the brain (and occasionally of the spine) often provides confirmation. In some cases, other tests including a spinal tap (lumbar puncture) may be needed. There is not a blood test to confirm the diagnosis.

How is it treated?

Like in the case of many other chronic diseases, there is not a cure for M.S. There are however many treatments available to help the condition.

- 1- Beta-interferons - Group of injectable medications
Avonex - Injected once a week intramuscular (into the muscle).
Betaseron - injected subcutaneous (just below the skin) every other day.
Rebif - Injected subcutaneous three days a week.
- 2- Glatiramer (Copaxone) - Also injected beneath the skin every day or three times a week.
- 3- Fingolimod (Gilenya) - Taken once a day by mouth.
- 4- Teriflunomide (Aubagio) - Taken once a day by mouth.
- 5- Dimethyl Fumarate (Tecfidera) - Taken twice a day by mouth.
- 6- Natalizumab (Tysabri) - Intravenous infusion once a month.
- 7- Lemtrada (Alemtuzumab) consist of 5 infusions at first followed by 3 infusions in 12 month.

What else can I do?

Make sure you discuss all your concerns with your doctor. Read about the disease and participate in support groups but remember every patient is different. It is critical that you remain physically active with doing any type of daily exercise. Maintaining your weight is critical for long term health, and a low carbohydrate diet can also be beneficial in many respects.

There are also medications and other treatments that can help with symptoms of fatigue, insomnia, muscle spasms, anxiety, depression, bladder problems and others. Always consult your doctors and other health care providers for any questions or concerns.