



# Multiple sclerosis information

---

## for health and social care professionals

MS: an overview

Diagnosis

Types of MS

Prognosis

Clinical measures

A multidisciplinary approach to MS care

Self-management

Relapse and drug therapies

Relapse

Steroids

Disease modifying drug therapies

Symptoms, effects and management

Vision

Fatigue

Cognition

Depression

Women's health

Bladder

Bowel

Sexuality

Mobility

Spasticity

Tremor

Pain

Communication and swallowing

Pressure ulcers

Advanced MS

Complementary and alternative medicine

Index

### Prognosis

One of the chief characteristics of MS is its unpredictability from one person to another, from one day to another, from one time of day to another. However, some prognostications can be made from the pattern of the disease over the first five years. For example, early problems with sensation and eyesight (as opposed to problems related to the cerebellum such as unsteadiness and clumsiness) usually indicate a more favorable form of MS. Younger age at onset is also a good prognostic sign<sup>2</sup>.

### Factors that influence prognosis<sup>3</sup>

#### Favourable

- Female
- Low rate of relapses per year (1-5 in five years)
- Complete recovery from the first attack
- Long interval between first and second attack
- Symptoms predominantly sensory eg optic neuritis
- Younger age of onset - less than 35 years
- Low disability at five years from onset.

#### Unfavourable

- Male
- High rate of relapses per year (3 or more in first five years)
- Incomplete recovery from the first attack
- Short interval between first and second attack
- Symptoms predominantly of motor involvement eg balance, weakness, ataxia
- Older age of onset - over 35 years
- Significant disability at five years from onset

After 15 years with MS, about half of the population will still be independent in terms of walking and the remaining half will need help with mobility. When people reach the point of requiring help with walking (EDSS 6.0) they are likely to progress, irrespective of whether they are having relapses, or if they have primary or secondary MS<sup>4</sup>.

Long-term studies suggest that MS only has a small impact on life expectancy of five to ten years compared to the general population. One study found that people with more complex disability (EDSS greater than or equal to 7.5) were more at risk of potentially life threatening complications - such as respiratory or cardiovascular problems - that can result from reduced mobility, and this affected the overall life expectancy figures<sup>5</sup>. Frequency of death by suicide has been found to be 7.5 times higher among patients with MS compared to the general population<sup>6</sup>.

The uncertainty of prognosis can be hard to deal with. Many people ask if there is any way of identifying 'triggers' which will cause the condition to worsen but there is very little proof that any particular event or circumstance can be identified. There is some evidence that stressful life events, such as a car accident or severe emotional stress, can make deterioration more likely. A meta-analysis<sup>7</sup> concluded that there is a consistent association between stressful life events and subsequent exacerbation in multiple sclerosis. However even this is controversial and there is usually little that can be done to prevent such stresses occurring.

There is no known reason why someone with MS should avoid either immunisation<sup>8</sup> or a necessary surgical operation. NICE guidance recommends people with MS should be offered immunisation against influenza and have any other immunisations and surgery that they need.

#### References

1. Lublin FD, Reingold SC. Defining the clinical course of multiple sclerosis: results of an international survey. *Neurology* 1996;46(4):907-11.
2. Vukusic S, Confavreux C. Natural history of multiple sclerosis: risk factors and prognostic indicators. *Curr Opin Neurol* 2007;20(3):269-74.
3. Hutchinson M. Predicting and preventing the future: actively managing multiple sclerosis. *Pract Neurol* 2009;9(3):133-43.
4. Cottrell DA, Kremenchutzky M, Rice GP, et al. The natural history of multiple sclerosis: a geographically based study. 5. The clinical features and natural history of primary progressive multiple sclerosis. *Brain* 1999;122(4):625-39.
5. Sadovnick AD, Ebers GW, Wilson RW, et al. Life expectancy in patients attending multiple sclerosis clinics. *Neurology* 1992;42(5):991-4.
6. Sadovnick AD, Eisen K, Ebers GC, et al. Cause of death in patients attending multiple sclerosis clinics. *Neurology* 1991;41(8):1193-6.
7. Mohr DC, Hart SL, Julian L. Association between stressful life events and exacerbation in multiple sclerosis: a meta-analysis. *BMJ* 2004;328(7442):731.
8. Farez MF, Correale J. Immunisations and risk of multiple sclerosis: systematic review and meta-analysis. *J Neurol* 2011;258(7):1197-1206.

#### MS Trust resources

MS Explained  
Primary progressive MS exposed



We hope you find the information in this book helpful. If you would like to speak with someone about any aspect of MS, contact the MS Trust information team and they will help find answers to your questions.

This book has been provided free by the Multiple Sclerosis Trust, a small UK charity which works to improve the lives of people affected by MS. We rely on donations, fundraising and gifts in wills to be able to fund our services and are extremely grateful for every donation received, no matter what size.

## MS Trust information service

### Helping you find the information you need

The MS Trust offers a wide range of publications, including a newsletter for health and social care professionals Way Ahead and the MS Information Update, which provides an ongoing update on research and developments in MS management.

For a full list of MS Trust publications, to sign up for Way Ahead and much more visit our website at [www.mstrust.org.uk](http://www.mstrust.org.uk)



Freephone 0800 032 3839 (Lines are open Monday - Friday 9am-5pm)

email [infoteam@mstrust.org.uk](mailto:infoteam@mstrust.org.uk)

write MS Trust  
Spirella Building  
Letchworth Garden City  
SG6 4ET



This publication will be reviewed in three years

MS Trust  
Multiple sclerosis information for health and social care professionals. Fourth edition.  
ISBN 1-904 156-24-X  
© 2011 Multiple Sclerosis Trust

Registered charity no. 1088353

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be produced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, electrostatic, magnetic tape, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without written permission of the publisher.