

Types of MS

Relapsing remitting MS

About 85% of people are diagnosed with the type of MS that manifests in a series of relapses (sometimes called an attack or exacerbation) followed by periods of good or complete recovery - a remission.

A relapse is defined as; the appearance of a new symptom or the reappearance of old symptoms that last more than 24 hours. A relapse can last for considerably longer and may persist for weeks or months, the average length of a relapse has been reported as 55 days. The frequency of relapses, the severity of symptoms experienced and the length of the gap between attacks are unpredictable. Similarly, it may sometimes be difficult to determine what is a fluctuation in symptoms (a day to day worsening or improvement) and what is a relapse.

On average people with relapsing remitting MS have one or two attacks a year, but this can vary. It is possible for symptoms to worsen gradually over time as recovery from relapses becomes less complete. The term rapidly evolving severe relapsing remitting MS is sometimes used for someone who has two or more disabling relapses in one year and evidence of increasing lesions on two consecutive MRI scans.

Secondary progressive MS

About 75% of people whose disease pattern begins with relapsing and remitting symptoms later develop secondary progressive MS (50% of those with relapsing remitting MS develop secondary progressive MS within ten years from diagnosis). The accepted definition of secondary progressive MS is that a person must have shown continued deterioration for the past six months whether or not they have continued to experience relapses. The transition to secondary progressive MS is psychologically difficult as people recognise they have moved into another phase of the disease and disease modifying medications may no longer be useful.

Some people find that the increase or progression of disability is very gradual, whilst for others it can occur more quickly.

Primary progressive MS

About 10% - 15% of people with MS are diagnosed with a form of MS in which disability increases from the outset. This is known as primary progressive MS (or, less commonly, chronic progressive MS). Some

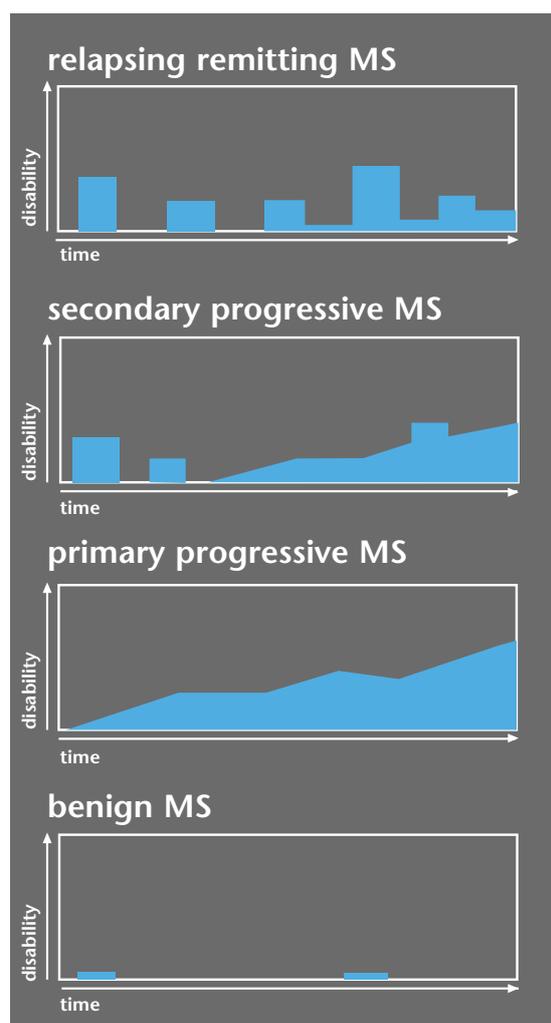
people can have a persistent increase in disability whilst others may experience plateaux or a more gradual worsening of symptoms.

Some people whose MS has been progressive from onset may also experience occasional relapses, this is sometimes referred to as relapsing progressive MS.

Benign MS

People with benign MS experience attacks separated by long periods with no symptoms. The phrase is sometimes used inaccurately to describe a period of mild symptoms following diagnosis. As the defining characteristic of benign MS is the long-term absence of symptoms, it can only be diagnosed retrospectively after ten or more years.

Some people with an initial benign course will eventually start to experience more frequent relapses and may eventually develop secondary progressive MS.



Adapted from Lublin FD¹.

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.

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