

SENSORY DISTURBANCES



Multiple Sclerosis Society
of SA & NT

Changes in sensation or feeling in your body may be one of the symptoms of MS. This is caused by the demyelination in the sensory pathways of the central nervous system (CNS). It results in the brain receiving disrupted or abnormal sensory feedback (information) from the body to know what it is feeling or doing. Like all symptoms of MS, sensory disturbances are experienced differently by each individual.

Changes in sensation are often experienced in the extremities, ie the hands and the feet but can be experienced in any part of the body. Changes in sensation can be transient or permanent.

Symptoms experienced may include:

- Numbness or tingling – this is more common
- Reduced or increased feeling
- Burning sensations
- Inability to feel hot/cold
- Decreased sensation of vibration
- Electric shocks

- Difficulty in holding objects or precision in placing objects
- Temperature abnormalities

Compensating for sensory disturbances

When there is impaired sensation in the hands or feet and you do not receive correct feedback about what you are feeling it is important to use other senses to help compensate. For example, use of vision helps to see what your hand is doing when you are unable to feel what you are doing.

Avoiding disuse

You may find that the affected limb is used less often because it does not function as well or feel the way that it used to, or because you are unable to feel what you are doing.

If the muscles in the affected area/limb are not used they may waste away and become weaker. To prevent this it is important that the affected areas are not neglected and are still used in activity as much as possible.

Sensory exercises

The following activities are useful in increasing feeling to areas of reduced sensation. It is important to give the affected area lots of extra stimulation to keep the existing nerve pathways working and help give some positive feedback to the brain.

These activities can also be done in moderation to help desensitise feeling if you suffer from too much sensation. If you experience any discomfort you should stop and speak to the Society's Occupational Therapist.

- Use cream or oil to massage the affected area well. This is also good for circulation.
- Stimulate the affected area using different textures and pressures. For example, use a brush to go over the area with different pressures, use the end of a pen to rub into the hands, use items like a rough towel or different fabrics to stimulate the area.
- Use ice to stroke over the area
- Try to pick up objects with your eyes closed, feel them, manipulate them and state what they are eg coins, keys.
- Fill an ice cream container with dried peas or rice. Place your

hand in the container and move them around.

- Place small items into the container such as marbles, coins and then try to find them.

Other tips

- When picking up items with the affected hand, look at the hand. This will give feedback about the grip.
- Use 2 hands if necessary.
- Items with larger grips are easier to hold.
- Be careful with items that may be hot, sharp or slippery. This includes drinks, items from the fridge with condensation, and looking for cutlery in a drawer.
- Turn on the cold water before the hot water.

Further information

If you have any questions or require further information about sensory disturbances and its management please contact your GP or health professional at the MS Society. Additionally if you would like to discuss a personalised management program please contact a health professional at the MS Society.

If you are interested in finding out more information

MS Society of Australia

About MS- How MS can affect you- Numbness.

<http://www.msaustralia.org.au/symptoms-numbness.asp>

National MS Society of USA

You can...manage annoying sensory symptoms

<http://nationalmssociety.org/living-with-multiple-sclerosis/you-can/manage-annoying-sensory-symptoms/index.aspx>

INFO33 CS MS Symptom Series – Sensory Disturbances

Last Updated 28 March 2011

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