

SYMPTOMS



Multiple Sclerosis Society
of SA & NT

Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a very variable condition and the symptoms depend on which areas of the central nervous system have been affected. There is no set pattern to MS and everyone with MS has a different set of symptoms, which vary from time to time and can change in severity and duration, even in the same person.

There is no typical MS. Most people with MS will experience more than one symptom, and though there are symptoms common to many people, no person would have all of them. Outside influences can exacerbate symptoms. For example, hot weather can make fatigue worsen. Infections can cause all sorts of other complications, however once the infection is treated the symptoms should subside.

New symptoms may not always be down to your MS. It is important to remember that not every ache and pain is connected and if a new symptom persists and becomes

an ongoing problem, you should seek medical advice.

Common symptoms include:

Abnormal speech

- slowing of speech
- slurring of words
- changes in rhythm of speech
- difficulty in swallowing (dysphagia)

Spasticity

- altered muscle tone can and muscle stiffness can affect mobility and walking
- spasms

For more information please see the **INFO08 Symptom series – Spasticity.**

Balance and co-ordination problems

- loss of balance
- tremor
- unstable walking (ataxia)
- giddiness (vertigo)
- clumsiness of a limb
- lack of co-ordination
- weakness - this can particularly affect the legs and walking.

There are many common invisible symptoms which bring a unique set of problems because other people assume that you don't **really** have a disease.

This can undermine your relationships and your confidence and discourage you from seeking treatment or help for problems. If your symptoms are hidden, most people won't know that you have a chronic illness – and many of them probably don't need to know.

However everyone with MS needs a few people who know what is going on, with whom they can openly discuss problems. A good confidante can also help you to decide how much, and when, to tell other people.

Hidden or invisible symptoms include the following:

Visual problems

- optic neuritis
- blurring of vision
- double vision (diplopia)
- involuntary rapid eye movement
- total loss of sight (rarely)

For more information please see **INFO55 CS MS Symptoms – Visual Disturbances.**

Altered sensation

- tingling

- 'pins and needles'
- numbness (paraesthesia)
- burning sensations

Pain

- muscle pains
- facial pain (such as trigeminal neuralgia)
- stabbing sharp pains
- burning tingling pain

For more information please see **INFO56 Symptom Series – Pain.**

Fatigue

- A debilitating kind of general fatigue which is unpredictable or out of proportion to the activity. Fatigue is one of the most common (and one of the most troubling) symptoms of MS.

For more information please see the **Fatigue series of Information Sheets.**

Bladder and bowel problems

- Bladder problems include the need to pass water frequently and/or urgently, incomplete emptying or emptying at inappropriate times.
- Bowel problems include constipation and, infrequently, loss of bowel control.

For more information please see
**INFO53 CS MS Symptoms –
Urinary Dysfunction and Bowel
Problems.**

Sexuality and intimacy

- impotence
- diminished arousal
- loss of sensation

For more information refer to the
Biogen booklet listed in the
references.

Sensitivity to heat

This symptom very commonly

causes a transient worsening of
symptoms.

Cognitive and emotional disturbances

- loss of short term memory
- loss of concentration, judgment
or reasoning

For more information please see
the **Cognition series of
Information Sheets.**

Source: MS Qld

If you are interested in more information

The Society has more information sheets included in the Symptoms Series as well
as a Managing MS and a Healthy Living series.

Please see the website for more details.

References

MS Society Australia

How MS can affect you (signs and symptoms)

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

Biogen Idec Australia

‘Sexuality and MS’. This booklet is only available by contacting the company –
either phone on 02 8875 3900 or email enquiriesauz@biogenidec.com

MS Society of Canada

Managing MS symptoms series of booklets

<http://mssociety.ca/en/help/booklets.htm>

MSRC (UK)

Choices leaflet – Symptoms

<http://www.msrc.co.uk/index.cfm/fuseaction/show/pageid/2853>

MS Trust

Symptoms of MS <http://www.mstrust.org.uk/atoz/symptoms.jsp>

MS Society (UK)

MS Essentials series Symptoms

http://www.mssociety.org.uk/support_and_services/free_publications/index.html

National MS Society US

Symptoms <http://www.nationalmssociety.org/about-multiple-sclerosis/what-we-know-about-ms/symptoms/index.aspx>

'But you look so good' brochure <http://www.nationalmssociety.org/multimedia-library/brochures/brochures-alpha-listing/index.aspx>

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