

TALKING TO YOUR DOCTOR ABOUT MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS



How to Talk to Your Doctor About Multiple Sclerosis

Preparing for your Doctor's Appointment

Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a disease where your body's immune system eats away at the protective sheath called myelin that covers your nerves. This damage to the myelin makes it hard for your brain, spinal cord and other areas of your body to communicate, and can permanently deteriorate the nerves themselves.

There is no cure, but there are actions you can take to manage MS symptoms. Early diagnosis and treatment help manage symptoms and reduce progression of the disease, meaning a good relationship with your doctor especially important.

This guide isn't a replacement for a doctor's visit. Here we'll cover tips to help you communicate effectively with your doctor and specific questions to ask — all things to help you get the most out of your relationship with your healthcare provider.

Looking for a Doctor?

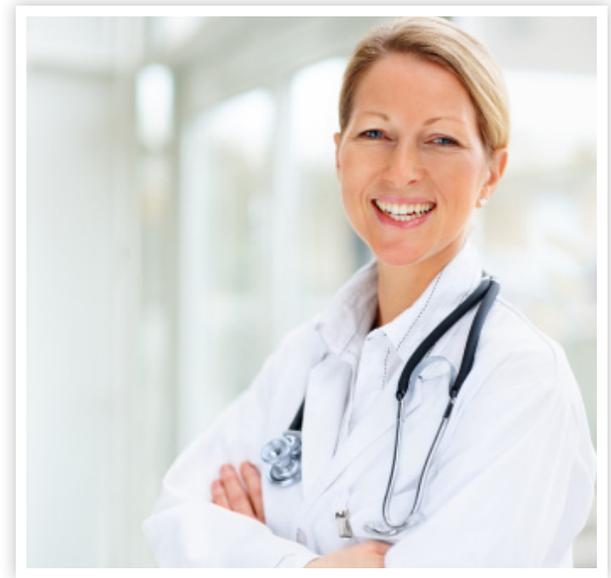
You're likely to start diagnosis and treatment for MS by seeing your family doctor or general practitioner. He or she may refer you to a neurologist, a doctor trained in nervous system disorders, who can provide specialized treatment.

How to Communicate Effectively with Your Doctor

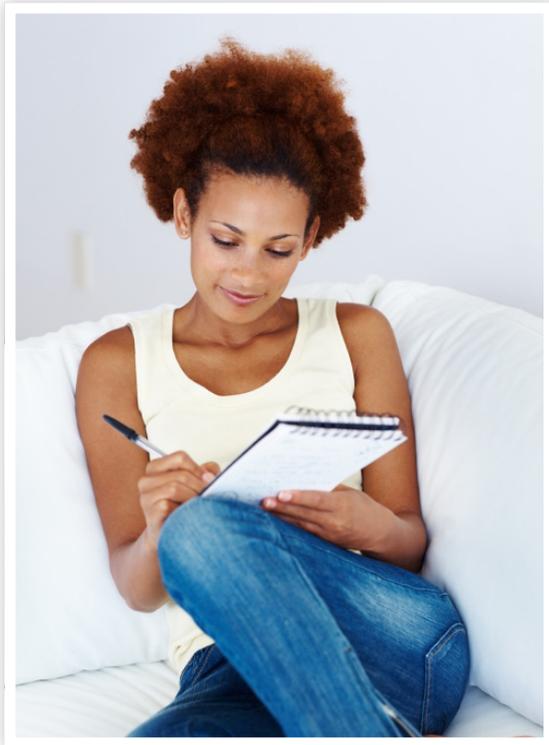
Actual face-time with your doctor can be precious little. You may wait for weeks for an appointment and then go through what feels like a whirlwind visit only to leave with more questions than answers about your MS symptoms and other health concerns.

Studies show the average amount of time patients spend with the doctor is less than 20 minutes. Since this is your time with the doctor, make the most of it by asking important questions and expressing concerns.

Communicating effectively with your doctor will allow you to share information and work together to make the best decisions about your health, resulting in the best possible care for you. Try incorporating these tips to get what you need from your doctor's visits.



“Early diagnosis and treatment help manage symptoms and reduce progress of multiple sclerosis...”



Be prepared.

Before your appointment, write down your questions, items to discuss and any changes in your condition. Make a list of things that have happened since your last visit and think about ways to describe your pain and symptoms. If you are organized you can make the best use of your time and your doctor's expertise.

These three lists are useful to have:

Medication List:

List all medications you are taking, including prescriptions, over-the-counter medicines, supplements and herbal remedies. Your list should include the name of the medication, strength and dosage as well as any side effects you're noticing.

Symptoms Journal:

A daily or weekly diary that lists all of your symptoms and how they've changed can be very helpful in diagnosing and treating MS. Also, considering including information like: pain ratings, depression, treatments, sleep times and events of the day. Use the same descriptions or scale so that you and your doctor can see patterns over time.

Questions List:

Write down all of the questions you want to ask the doctor. There is a full list of questions at the end of this guide to help you.

Consider bringing a family member or friend.

Having someone along can help you relax and remember to ask the right questions. They can also help you remember what the doctor told you.

Be confident.

Don't be afraid to ask questions. If something is confusing ask the doctor to explain more clearly.

Be honest.

Make sure your doctor knows the whole story, including the extent of your pain, worries and any treatment or medication you are taking on your own. Don't be embarrassed to share details. Your doctor needs this information to treat you well.

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Take notes.

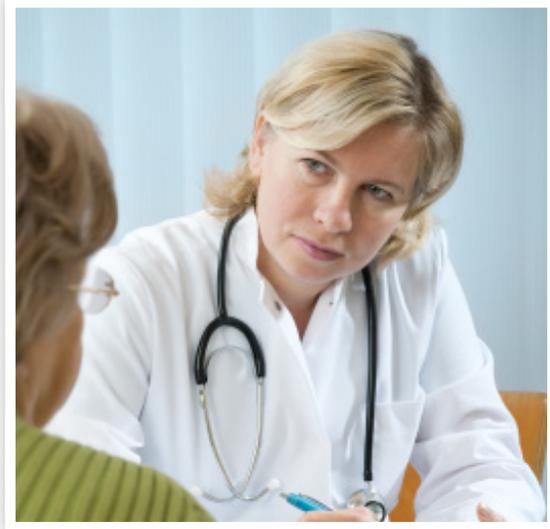
Write down important information or instructions, so you can remember the doctor's advice later.

Prioritize your concerns.

Remember that you have limited time. Start with the most important topics for which you really want answers. You can always follow up with nurses or with a phone call later for smaller issues.

Repeat key points.

Repeating things will help your doctor to clarify anything that has been confusing and will help you remember what has been discussed.



Questions to Ask When You're First Diagnosed

What types of changes should I make to my lifestyle?

How is MS treated?

What are the benefits and side effects of these treatments?

How can I explain my condition to my family, friends, and employer?

Is Exercise Good for MS?

Sometimes — yes! People with MS often cut back on their physical activity. But, depending on the severity of your MS symptoms, that can be one of the worst things you can do. For someone with mild to moderate MS, regular exercise, such as walking, swimming, weight training and other physical activity, may result in benefits like improved strength, muscle tone, balance and coordination, bladder and bowel control, and less fatigue and depression.

Questions to Ask Your Doctor

Whether you're newly diagnosed or a long-time patient coping with new symptoms, clear dialogue with your doctor is an important part of getting your MS properly treated. By talking openly and regularly with your doctor, you can take an active role in your care.

Here are some questions to consider asking your doctor to spark conversation.

About MS

How do you know that I have MS? What tests are used for diagnosing MS?

Are there other conditions that could be causing my symptoms?

What could have caused my MS?

How is MS affecting my body?

About Your Doctor

Have you treated many cases of MS?
Will I need to see a specialist?
What changes in my symptoms should I call you about? How can I reach you if I need to in between appointments?
How much do you read current research on MS and new treatments?

About Treatment Options

How is MS treated? What medications are used?
What is your plan to control my MS symptoms?
What are the benefits and side effects of these treatments?
Will any medications interact with other medications, over-the-counter products, dietary or herbal supplements I am already taking?
What about alternative or complementary therapies for pain management?
How will you monitor my MS?



About Lifestyle Changes

What types of changes should I make to my lifestyle?
Should I exercise? What types of exercises should I do? Are there any types of exercises I should avoid? How can I exercise if I am in pain?
Will I be able to continue working and doing my usual daily activities?
Do I need to make changes to my diet? Are there foods that will worsen my symptoms?
What types of things trigger MS symptoms? What should I avoid?

About the Future

What is my prognosis?
Where can I find a support group?
How can I explain my condition to my family, friends, and employer?
Where can I get some more information about this condition?

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www.multiplesclerosisconnect.com