

03.01.2023

# Cognition

How to Make the Most of Your Mind

**CAN DO**  
MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

**WEBINAR**   
WEDNESDAYS

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# March PROGRAMS

Thursday, March 9

## JUMPSTART

Strategies to Sharpen Your Mind

Tuesday, March 14

## YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

Cognition

Starting Tuesday, March 14

## 4-Part COACHING SERIES

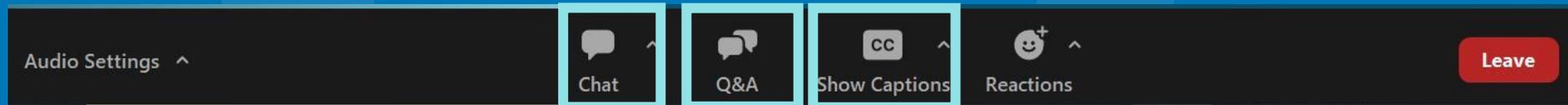
Making Diet Changes that Stick



[CANDO-MS.ORG](http://CANDO-MS.ORG)

# How to Ask Questions During the Webinar

Type in your questions using  
the Q & A Box



Provide comments and  
engage with the speakers and  
audience using the **Chat Box**

**NEW!** Closed captioning

# YOUR SPEAKERS



**Laura Hancock**  
Psychologist

Madison, WI



**Betty Matthew**  
Speech Language Pathologist

Atlanta, GA

# LEARNING OBJECTIVES



- 1 Learn basic facts about cognitive changes in MS. What we know about MS cognitive changes.
- 2 Understand how cognitive changes are assessed and managed.
- 3 Understand the impact cognitive changes have on employment, daily life, and relationships.
- 4 Recognize the importance of early screening.

# INTERACTIVE POLL



**What is your  
biggest cognitive  
challenge?**

**Memory**

**Word finding**

**Attention**

**Planning**

**Decision making**

**Processing speed**

# INTERACTIVE POLL



**Which part of your life has been most impacted?**

**Work**

**Relationships**

**Communication**

**Level of independence**

**Mental Health**

**Other  
(Put it in the Chat!)**

# What is Cognition?



- Cognition is thinking and mental processes
- The way you interact with the world
- There are different types of cognitive skills, including:
  - Attention
  - Executive functions
  - Memory
  - Language
  - Spatial skills
  - Motor skills

# Cognitive Change In MS



45-70% of people living with MS will experience cognitive changes related to the disease

Common symptoms include:

- Slowed speed of thinking
- Word-finding difficulty
- Memory problems
- Working memory issues

Some people experience them before they even know they have MS

Others don't experience them until after they've had MS for 20+ years

# Cognitive Change in MS



- Cognitive symptoms vary significantly in **severity**
  - many people will only experience mild changes
- Cognitive symptoms can have a major impact on quality of life:
  - Can limit work-related tasks, cause problems at work
  - Can interfere with family-related tasks
  - Can be frustrating and hard to cope with

# Intervention and Rehabilitation



We also know that these changes respond to intervention/rehabilitation

Studies show that we can lessen the impact of cognitive changes for people living with MS by making some lifestyle changes, such as:

- Getting plenty of sleep (7-9 hours)
- Regular exercise (150 minutes total/week)
- Limiting/stopping cigarette and/or marijuana smoking
- Healthy eating
- Regular cognitive and social stimulation
- Managing emotional symptoms

# Intervention and Rehabilitation



Working with a rehabilitation professional can help people with MS work to:

- Strengthen skills
- Learn ways to work around new challenges
- Develop new strategies for completing tasks
- Gain confidence and increase self-efficiency
- Live your best life despite living with MS!

# Who are Rehabilitation Professionals?



They can help you work on cognition, much like doing PT for your brain!

Depending on the healthcare system, you might find one or all of these professionals:

- Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP)
- Occupational Therapist
- Rehabilitation Psychologist
- Neuropsychologist

# How Do I Detect Cognitive Issues?



You might notice things like:

- Making mistakes with bills or paperwork
- Trouble recalling a conversation
- Trouble finding the right word or substituting words

Many life factors can interfere with optimal cognition

The best way to know whether there are concerning cognitive symptoms is to have your skills screened or evaluated

## Case 1:

### Maria



- 39-year-old woman who has had MS for 10 years
- She has noticed that she seems to be making more mistakes in her work as an accountant:
  - Tasks seem to take her longer
  - She has difficulty finding the “right” words in meetings and conversations with coworkers
  - She completely forgot about a deadline, something she has never done in the 15 years she has worked for her employer
- These changes are frustrating and worrisome

# INTERACTIVE POLL



**What should  
Maria do?**

**Discuss with her  
Neurologist**

**Go part-time**

**Reach out to friends  
and family for support**

**Ask employer for help  
and more time for  
completing tasks**

## Case 1:

## Maria



- Maria decides to make an appointment with her neurologist to talk to her about these concerns
- Her neurologist places a referral to Neuropsychology. She later meets with Dr. Smith, the neuropsychologist who regularly works with the neurologist's patients
- At their first visit, Dr. Smith visits with Maria to ask her about the bothersome symptoms and collect important information about her medical and psychiatric history.
- Maria is welcome to bring her spouse/loved one

## Case 1:

## Maria



- Dr. Smith or a psychology technician (psychometrist) then administers tests that measure cognitive skills.
- Most tests are in a spoken question and answer format.
- They will vary in style and difficulty.
- No one gets all questions answered or “correct.”
- Many people tell us that taking the tests is interesting and different, even if some items are challenging and taking them is tiring.

## Case 1:

## Maria



- Dr. Smith then meets with Maria to review the results, what the results mean, and any recommendations/ suggestions to help Maria with her symptoms.
- The tests revealed that Maria is having difficulty with slowed processing speed and learning efficiency.
- Dr. Smith will schedule follow-up sessions with Maria to help her work on rehabilitating any weaknesses and learn some new skills to compensate
- Dr. Smith also sends the results to Maria's Neurologist and will work with the Neurologist to help continually monitor how Maria is doing and if new evaluation/intervention is needed

## Case 2:

### John



- 53-year-old man who has had MS for 20 years
- He has been having such significant difficulty with cognition, that he took an early retirement option from his job as a computer programmer a year ago
- Even simple tasks take a long time to complete
- He has difficulty communicating with his spouse; words come slowly and are difficult to understand
- He has trouble helping with household chores like paying bills on schedule
- These changes are frustrating and worrisome

# INTERACTIVE POLL



**What should  
John do?**

**Discuss with his  
Neurologist**

**Do his best to try to  
ignore these symptoms**

**Reach out to friends  
and family for support**

**Discuss with his PCP**

## Case 2:

### John



- John's spouse makes an appointment with his Neurologist to talk to about these concerns
- His Neurologist gives John a quick test to help determine what further action is needed; John is asked to remember some words, name some objects, and draw a few things
- The Neurologist, Dr. Jones, is concerned by the results of the screening test and refers John to work with a SLP who sees his patients

## Case 2:

### John



- Tammy, the SLP, meets with John and his spouse to discuss their concerns and gather additional information
- Tammy then administers a series of tests to take a closer look at cognitive skills. These tests are like the ones a neuropsychologist uses, including in the varying difficulty and paper-and-pencil format
- Using the results of the cognitive tests, Tammy works together with John and his spouse to make a treatment plan to address areas of weakness and areas of concern
- Tammy will communicate progress back to the Neurologist and continue to monitor John as well

## Case 3:

## Dominique



- She is a 30-year-old woman who has had MS for 8 years
- She is a stay-at-home mom to her two young children (ages 7 and 4)
- She has been noticing some issues lately:
  - Missing healthcare/other appointments for her children, which is unusual for her
  - Feels generally “scattered” and “foggy”
  - She recently forgot that she agreed to make crafts for a PTA event
- These changes are frustrating, but she isn’t really that worried because she is just so busy; her spouse has mentioned these issues to her on several occasions

## Case 3:

# Dominique



- She attends a follow-up with her PCP over the summer; when she is at her appointment, she remembers these symptoms and mentions it
- Her PCP (who also manages Dominique's MS) administers a brief screening test, where she achieves a perfect score. However, a screening test for depression was positive.
- The PCP offers medication and/or psychotherapy referral for depressive symptoms. Dominique decides to start with medication.
- At her next PCP follow-up, the doctor administers the depression screener again; her score improved.

## What Else Can Contribute to Cognitive Symptoms?

- As we saw with Dominique, what seem like cognitive issues could be caused by other factors
- We mentioned earlier some important things anyone can do to help their brains function at their best.
- What were they?



# INTERACTIVE POLL



**The most common lifestyle changes that can have a positive impact on cognition:**

**Good Sleep**

**Regular exercise**

**Limiting/Stopping cigarette and/or marijuana smoking**

**Healthy Eating**

**Regular cognitive and social stimulation**

**Managing emotional symptoms**

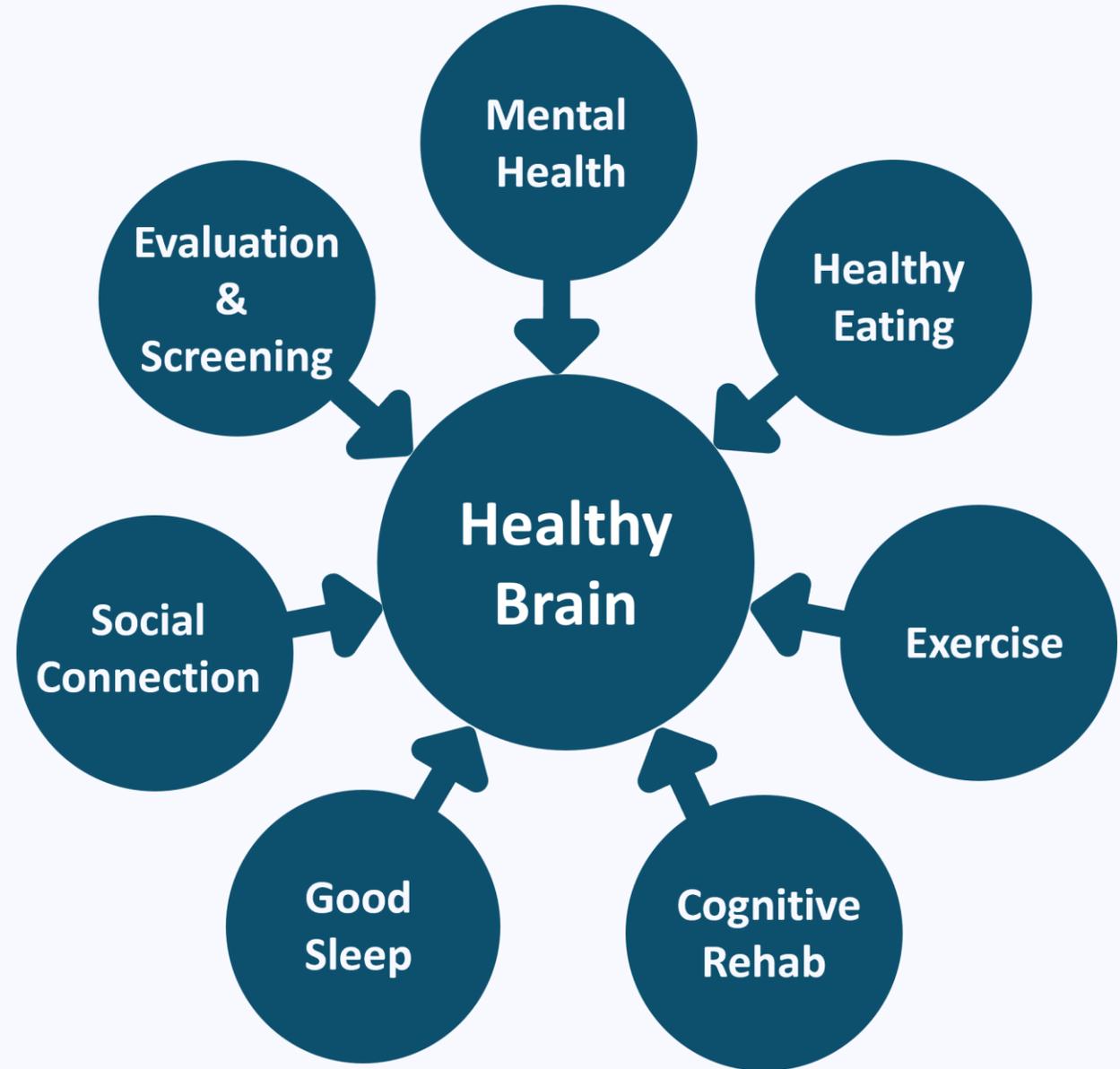
# The Impact of Cognitive Symptoms



- As we saw with our cases, these symptoms can have wide-ranging impact on peoples' lives
  - Some may experience few symptoms that, while bothersome, are manageable
  - Others may experience symptoms that cause them to lose a job, cause tension/stress in marital and other important relationships, lose the ability to drive, or necessitate significant changes to important life roles
- Our goal at Can Do MS is to help you take action to address factors you can control, to the degree that you can

# Contributing Factors

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# Key Take-Aways



- Cognitive symptoms can be evaluated and managed by one of several professionals, including SLP, OT, neuropsychologists, and/or rehabilitation psychologists
- We **STRONGLY ENCOURAGE** you to talk to your Neurologist or PCP about any concerns you have regarding cognition
- Screening at a doctor's office is a great way to detect cognitive issues early so that intervention can take place
- Feel empowered to take control of factors you can, like getting more exercise or doing cognitively engaging tasks

Q+A



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04.12.2023

# Staying Active

How to Approach Activity with Confidence

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