

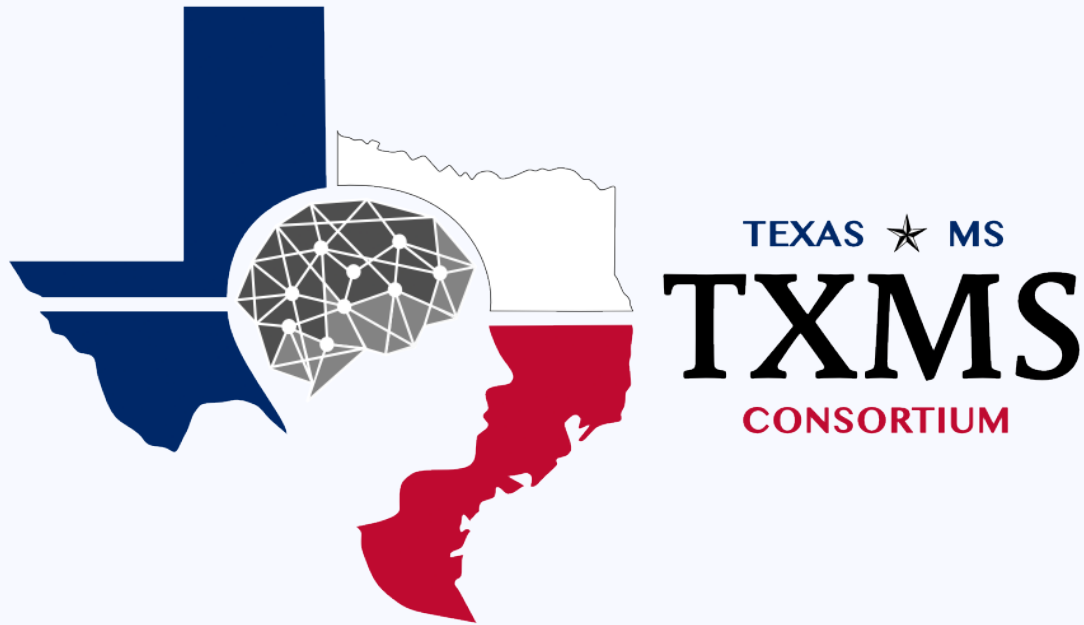
# Thriving with MS

Strategies for Aging Well

**CAN DO**  
MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

**WEBINAR**   
WEDNESDAYS

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# UPCOMING PROGRAMS

**DECEMBER 10**

**SPECIAL WEBINAR**

Beneath the Surface: Understanding Invisible Symptoms of MS

**DECEMBER 11**

**WEBINAR**

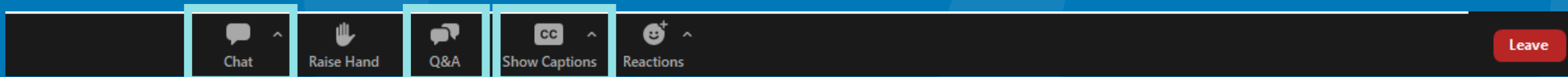
Latest MS Research and News



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

# How to Ask Questions During the Webinar

Type in your questions  
using the Questions Box



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



**NEW!** Closed captioning



# YOUR SPEAKERS



**Leorah Freeman**

**Neurologist**

Austin, TX



**Lisa Doggett**

**Family and Lifestyle  
Medicine Physician**

Austin, TX

# LEARNING OBJECTIVES



1

Understand the challenges that come with aging with *MS*

2

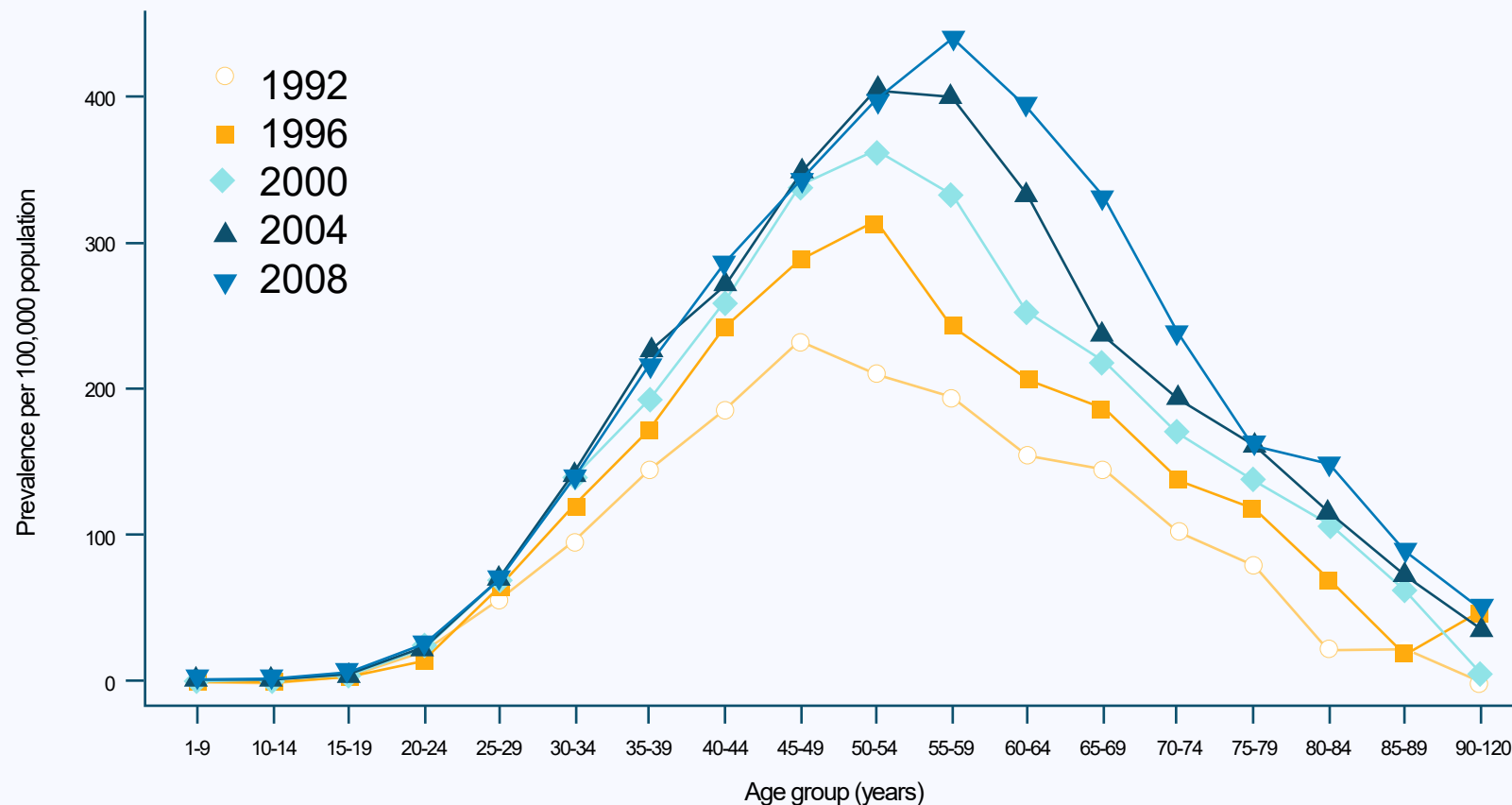
Learn lifestyle recommendations and strategies to support aging well

3

Discuss *MS* therapies and how they change as we age

# People with MS are living longer

Age-specific prevalence of MS in select years (1992–2008)<sup>1</sup>



In the US, the prevalence of MS is highest in the 55–64-year-old age group.

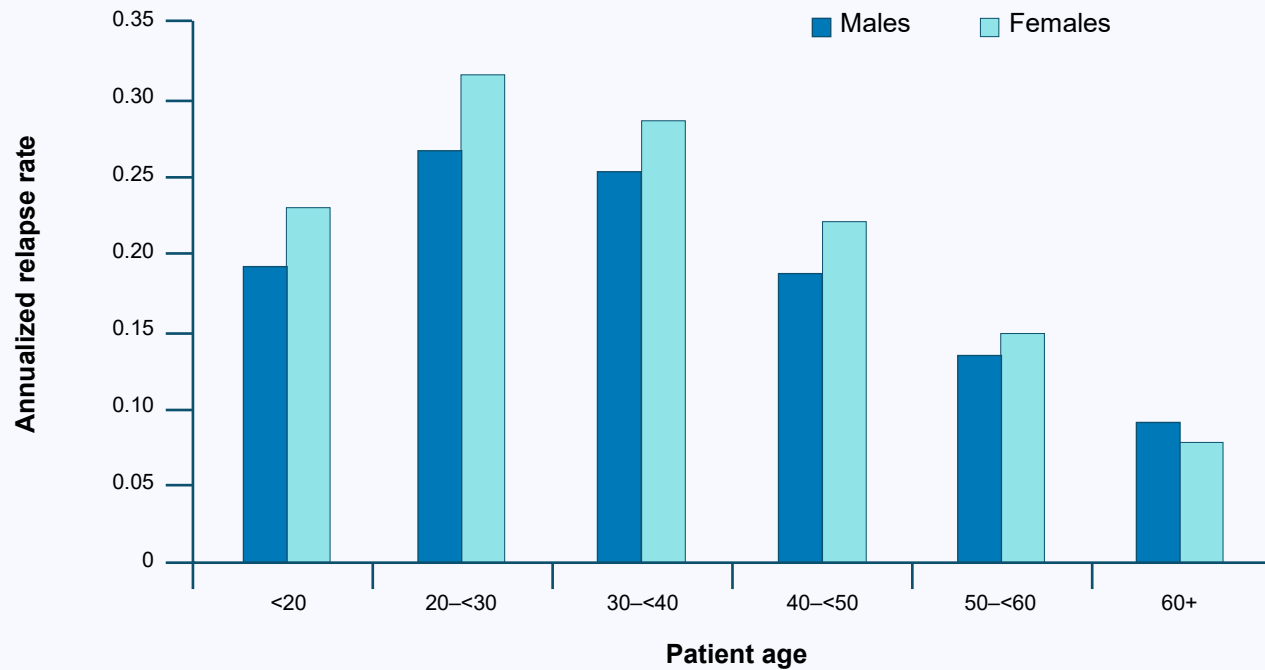
It is important to help people with MS thrive across the lifespan.

1. Kingwell E et al. J Neurol 2015;262:2352–2363; Wallin M.T. et al, Neurology;92:e1029-e1040.



# MS Changes as People Age

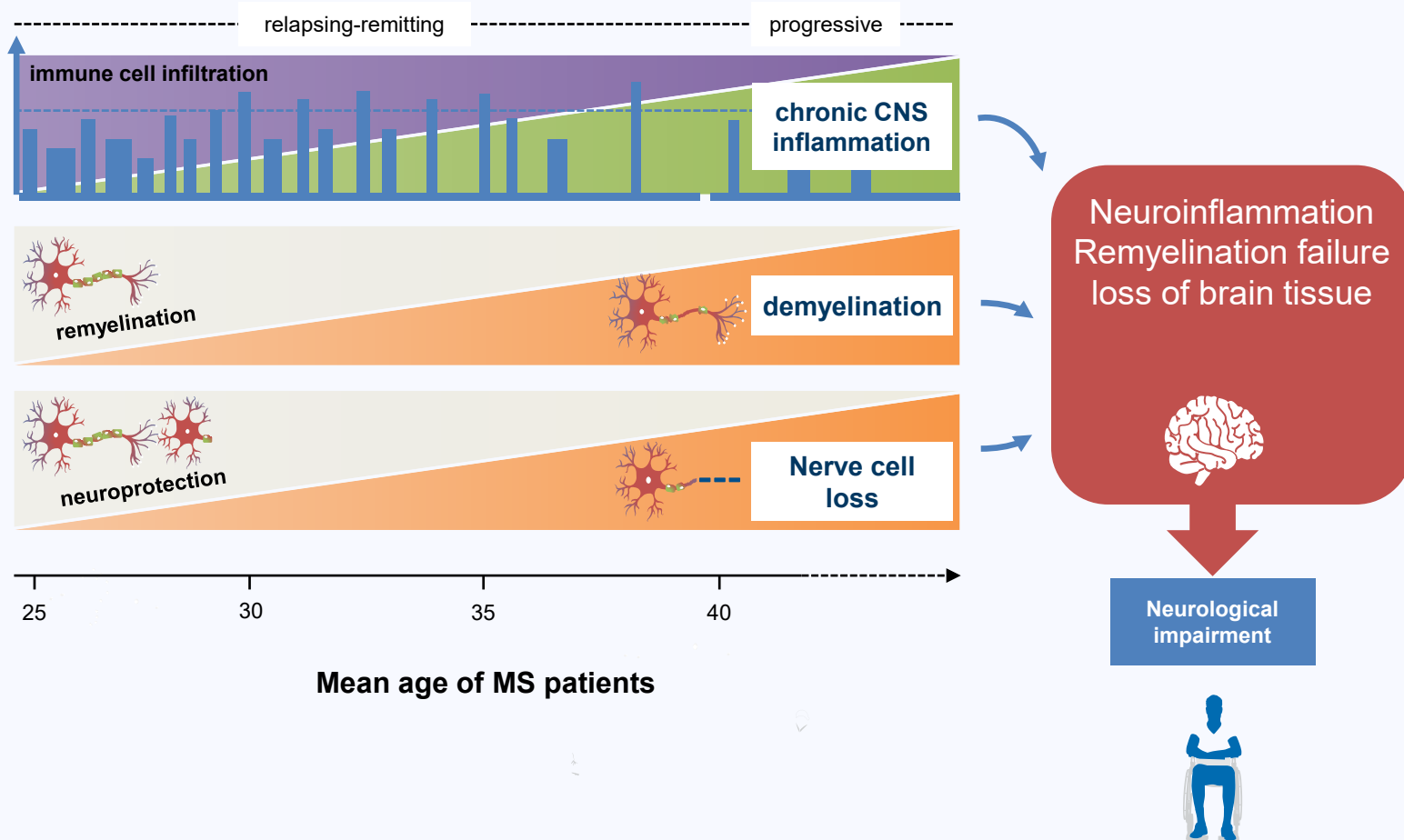
Relapse rates in males and females with MS stratified by patient age (N=2,477) [2003]<sup>1</sup>



As people age, so does their immune system, a phenomenon called **Immune Senescence**.

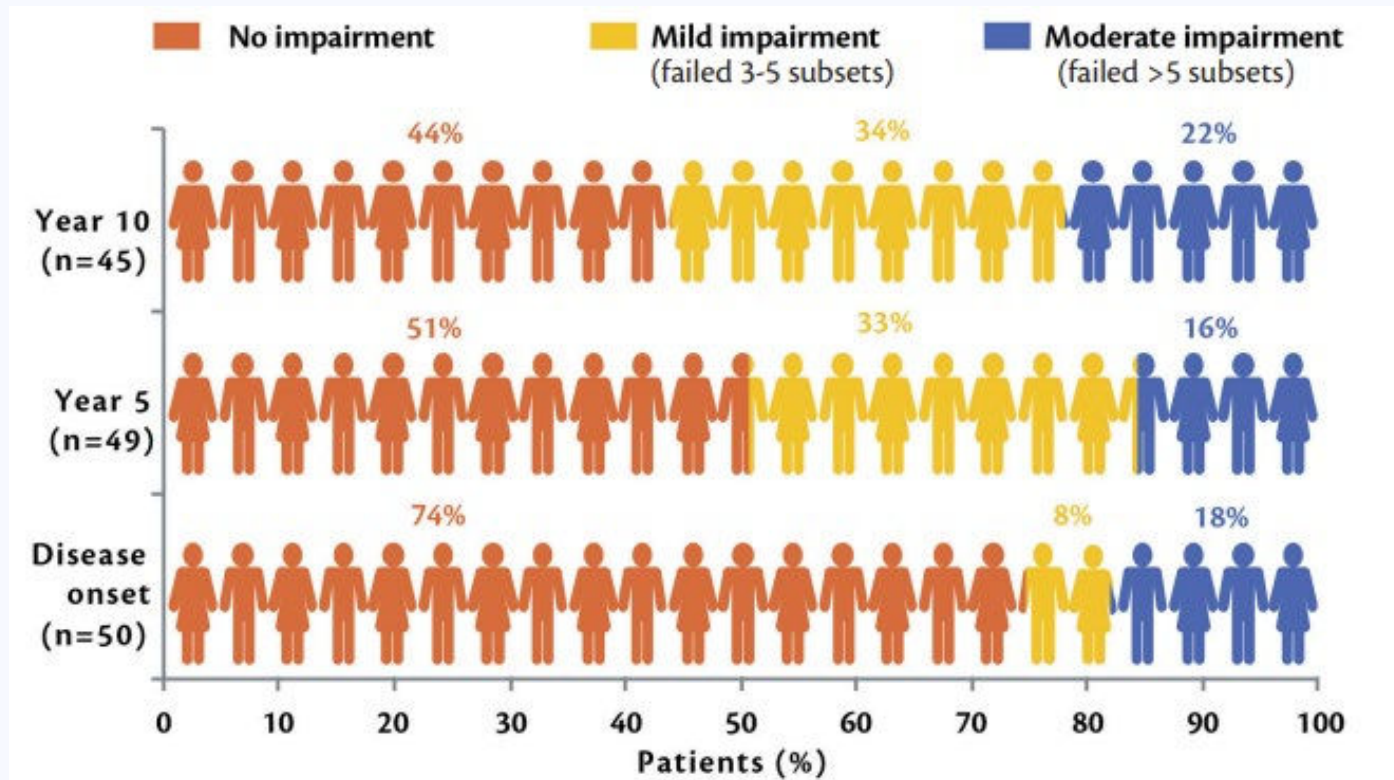
Therefore, people with MS experience fewer relapses with age, but relapse recovery can be more difficult.

# Aging is Associated with a Greater Risk of Progression



  
The low-grade inflammation associated with aging can increase the risk of progression.

# Risk of Cognitive Impairment Increases with Time



With time from diagnosis, the proportion of people with MS who have cognitive changes increases.

# Cognitive Symptoms in MS



Problems with memory or recall of information



Loss of attention or concentration



Difficulties processing information



Issues with complex tasks or problem-solving



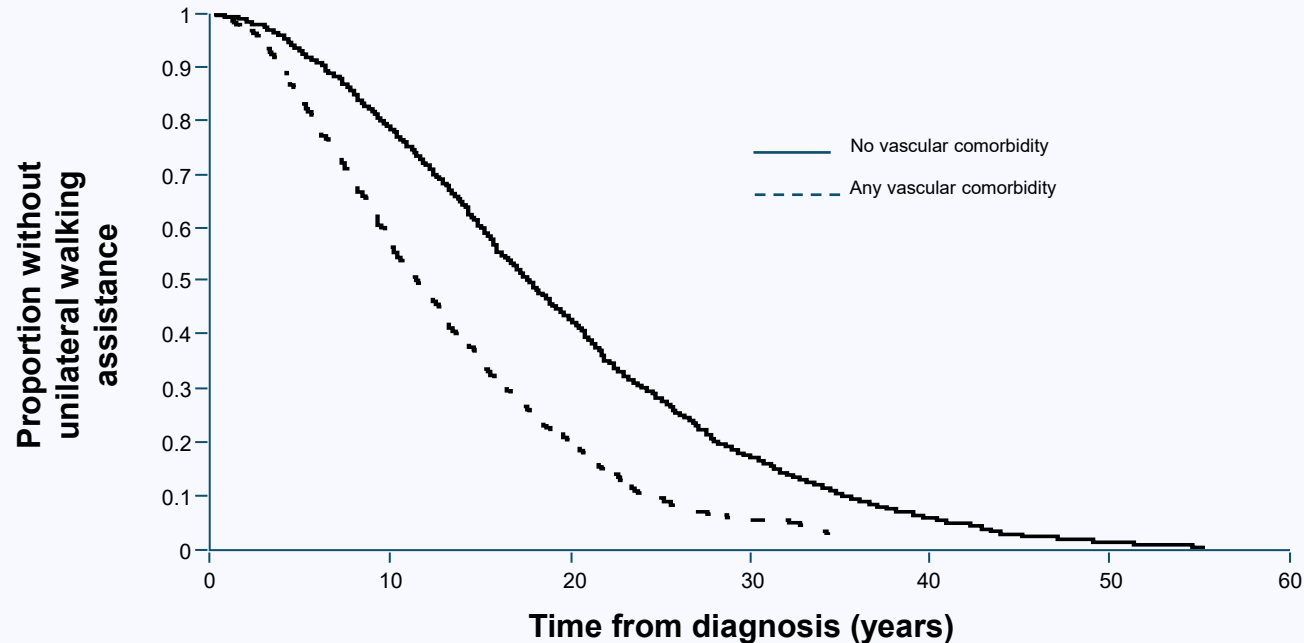
Changes in visual-spatial abilities



Anxiety and depression may make cognitive problems worse for people with MS.

# Comorbidities Can Accelerate Progression

Time from MS diagnosis to needing cane to walk (N=2,858)<sup>1</sup>



Comorbidities such as smoking, diabetes, uncontrolled high blood pressure, high cholesterol, or heart disease **accelerate progression and increase risk of cognitive impairment.**

# Hormonal Changes Can Impact MS Symptoms

Menopause symptoms may overlap with those of MS

Sleep disturbance

Mood changes

Bladder and sexual dysfunction

Cognitive symptoms

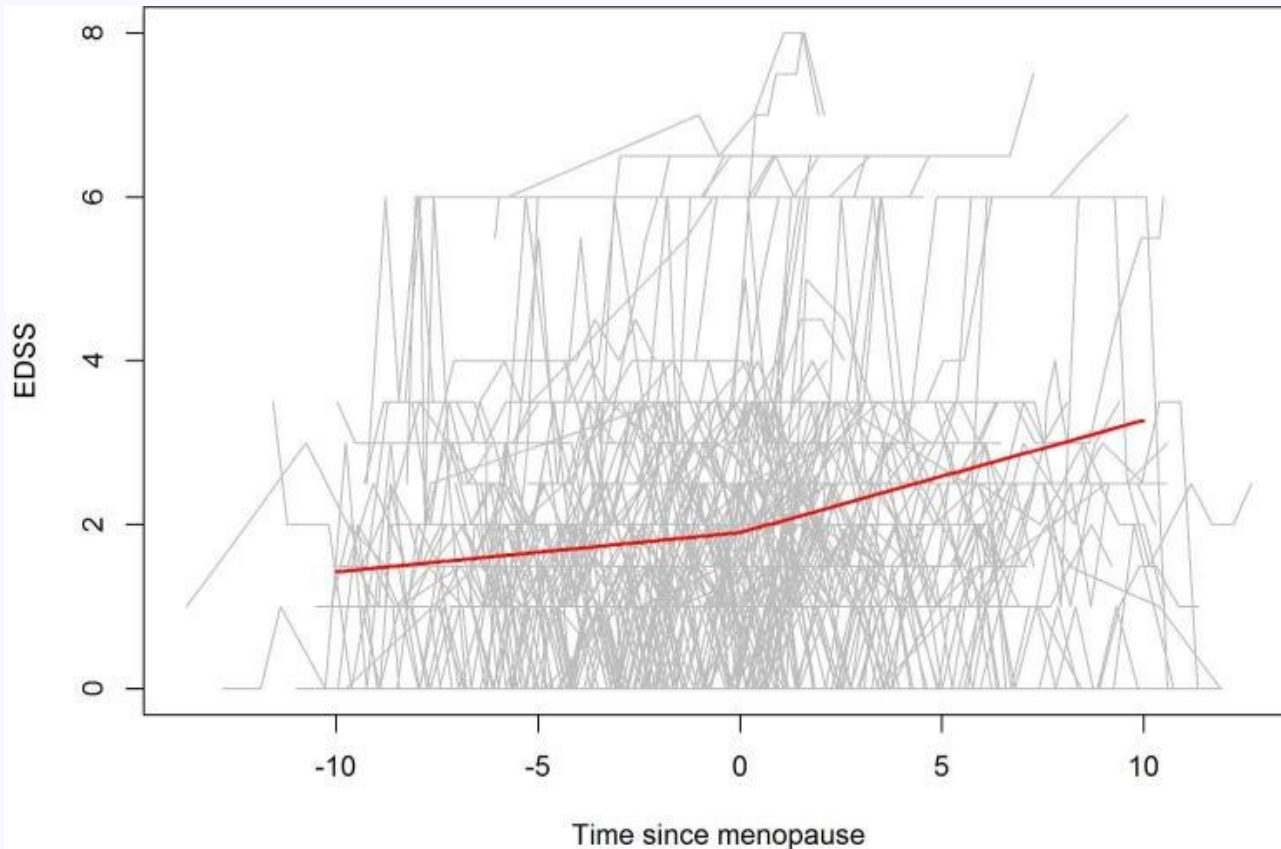
Bone Health

Fatigue



Some studies suggest women with MS experience worsening MS symptoms post menopause, particularly fatigue, mood disorders, urologic symptoms (bladder irritability and incontinence), and sexual dysfunction

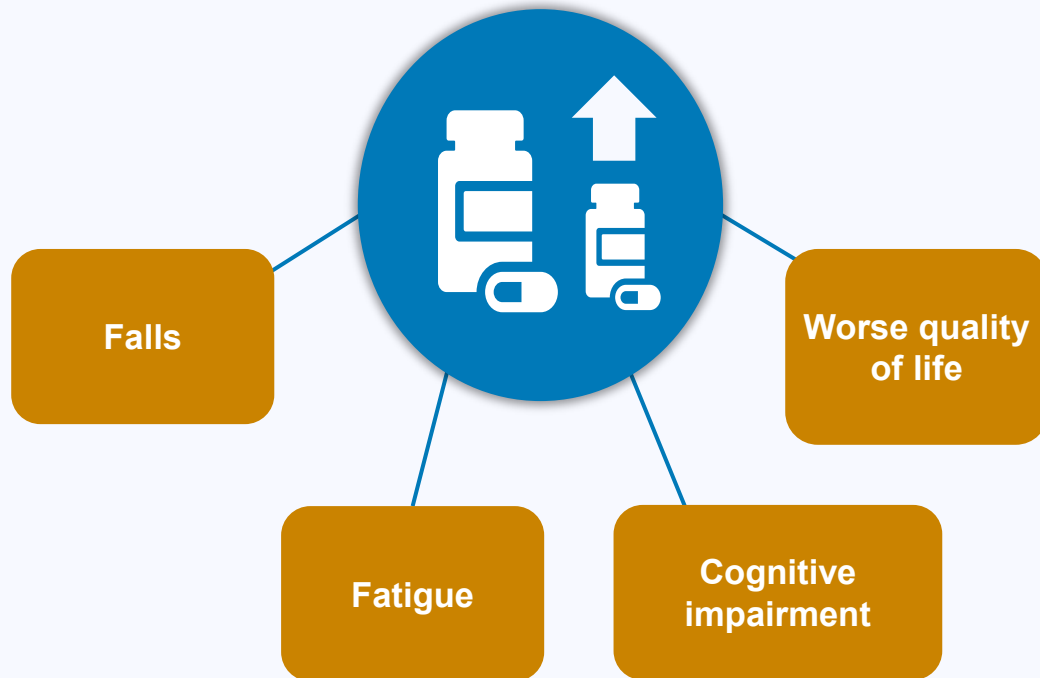
# Hormonal Changes May Impact the Course of MS



In a longitudinal study following women with MS over 10 years (N=124), the authors found that the post-menopausal phase was associated with worsening of disability scores.

This is likely due to the **hormonal and immune changes** occurring during menopause, which are worsened by ageing.

# Polypharmacy Can Lead to Worse Outcomes



**Polypharmacy** is when someone takes multiple medications at the same time, usually, five or more.

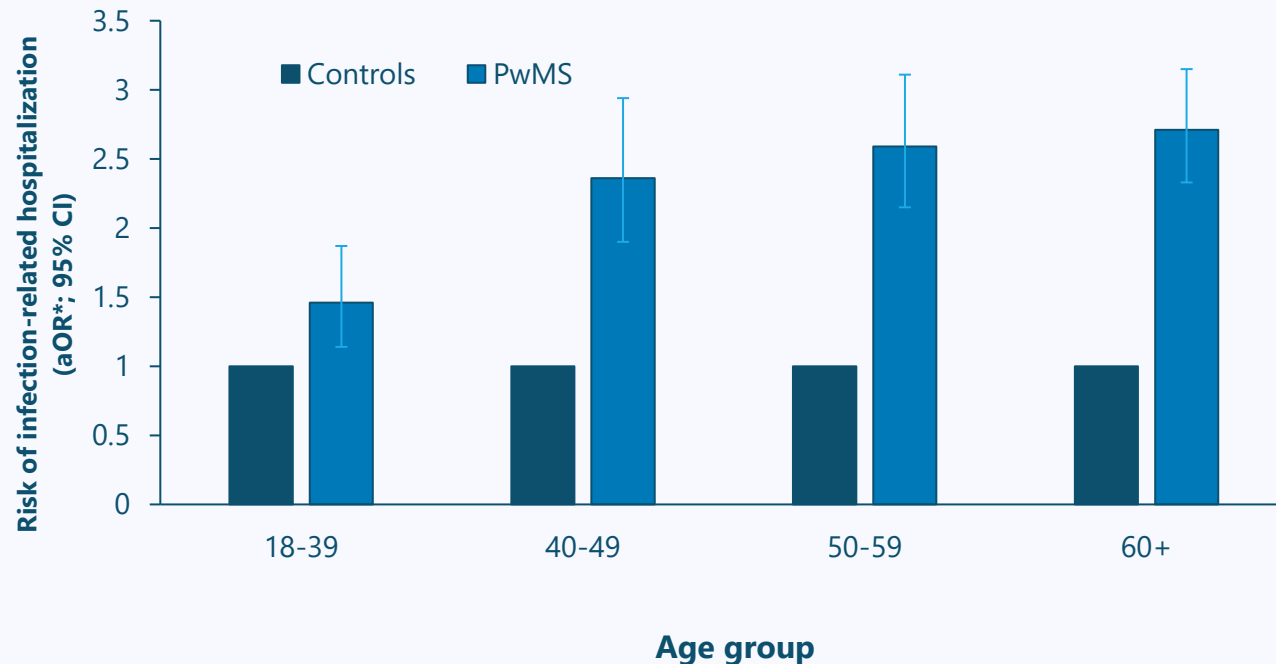
A recent study showed that the use of multiple **medications affecting the central nervous system**, a type of polypharmacy, has increased in people with MS between 2008-2021, particularly in women.<sup>1</sup> This exposes people with MS to complications and adverse effects.

When possible, reevaluate your medication list with your doctor



# Infections are More Common with MS and Age

Infection-related hospitalizations in pwMS vs matched controls (N=43,016)



Most common infections leading to hospitalization

1. UTI
2. Pneumonia
3. Intestinal
4. Skin and SC tissue
5. Sepsis



MS, the aging of the immune system, and MS therapies may all contribute to the **increased risk of infection** seen as people age

# Working With Your Healthcare Team



# Building a Care Team with YOU at the Center

Neurologist

Mental Health Specialist

Neuro-  
psychologist



Others  
based on  
needs

Primary  
Care

Urologist

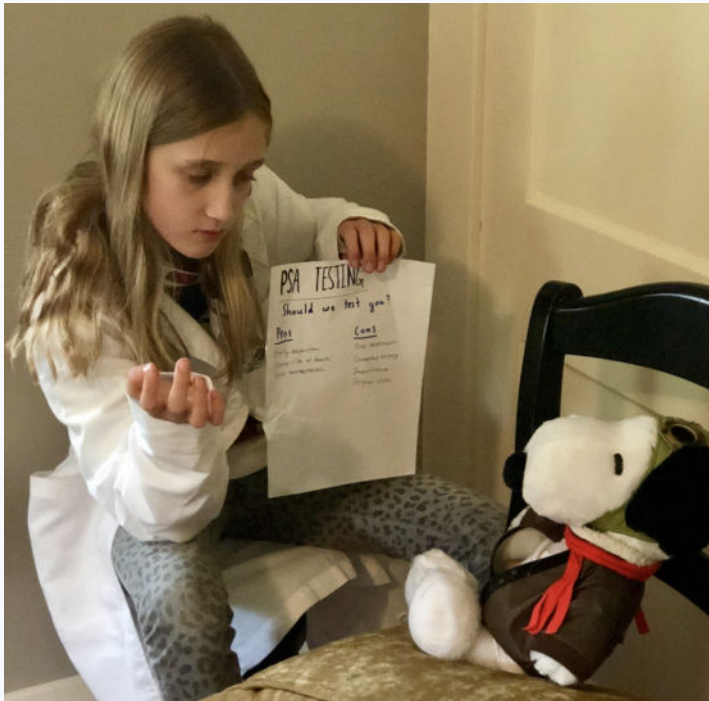
PT, OT, SLP



Building a comprehensive healthcare team is critical to meeting your needs and helping you thrive.

Your MS doctor can help you by referring you to the right specialists.

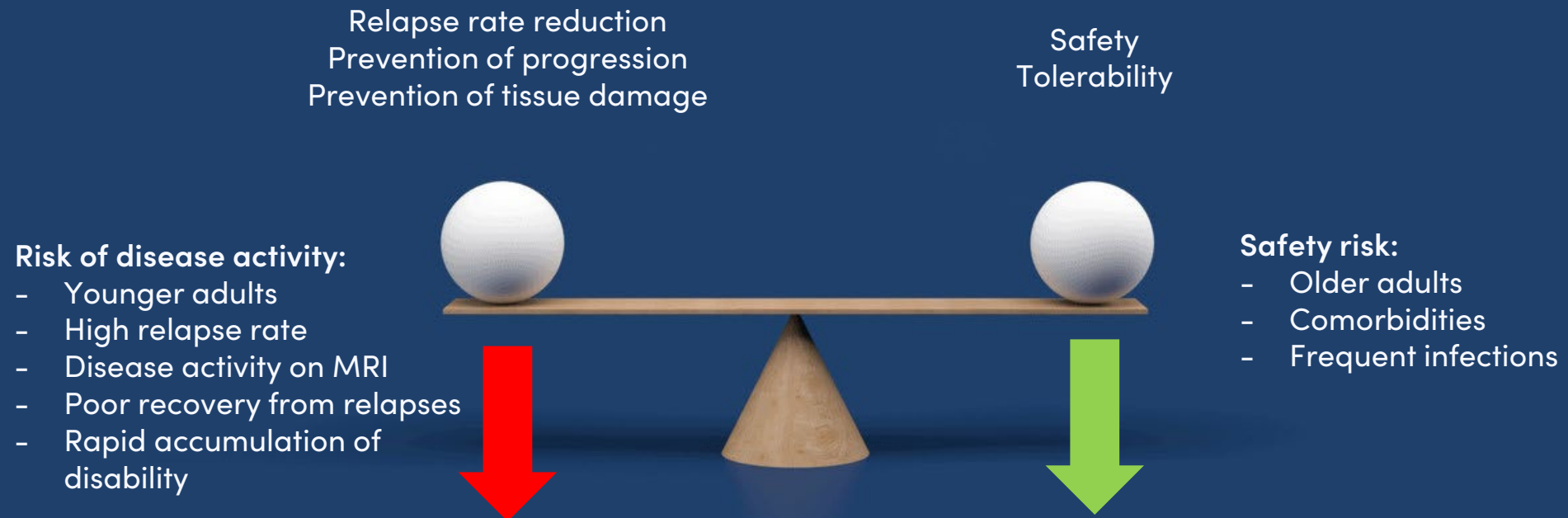
# Communicating Effectively with Your Care Team



- Complete registration materials ahead of time – or arrive early to do them on-site
- Communicate openly and honestly
- When you have an appointment, bring:
  - Updated list of all medications and supplements
  - Medical records and imaging discs (if applicable)
  - List of questions
  - A trusted friend or family member
- Advocate for yourself
  - Ask for clarification if you don't understand instructions
  - Make sure you know next steps
  - Have a plan to get test results
- If your doctor isn't meeting your needs, talk to them about your concerns. If you can't resolve your issues, it's OK to look for a new one.

# Making Treatment Decisions with Your Doctor

Treatment decisions, particularly decisions to discontinue treatment as you age, are highly personalized and need to be made in partnership with your doctor.



## Making Sure Your Medication List is Appropriate

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- Polypharmacy is common in people with MS and can increase risk of adverse events.
- While prescribed medications are most often appropriate, sometimes medication needs change over time, and some may no longer be useful or safe.

### Recommendations:

- Always review your current medications with your doctor.
- Make sure your doctor knows of medications prescribed by your other doctors.
- Ask questions to ensure you understand why a new medication is prescribed and how you know it works for you.




# Feel Safe To Discuss Hormonal Changes

- Hormonal changes, particularly perimenopause and menopause, bring on a range of symptoms that may overlap with or worsen MS symptoms.
- **Recommendations:**
  - Speak to your doctor about your symptoms to understand if they are due to MS or menopause
  - Discuss treatment options that can help improve your symptoms. Hormone replacement therapies are not contra-indicated for women with MS.
  - Ensure you undergo appropriate screening tests for osteoporosis.



# Vaccines for Older Adults with MS





# Preventative Care: Vaccines



- Vaccine-preventable infections can lead to long-term illness, hospitalization, and even death.
- Over the last 50 years, vaccines have saved an estimated 154 million lives (Lancet, May 2024).
- In the U.S., CDC estimates:
  - 1 million people get shingles each year, and about 10-20% will develop post-herpetic neuralgia (burning in nerves and skin that can be long-lasting).
  - 2023-24 flu season was “moderately severe”: at least 34 million illness, 15 million medical visits, 380,000 hospitalizations, 17,000 deaths
- People with MS may be more susceptible to infections and more likely to develop complications.



**Vaccines are safe and recommended  
for people with MS.**

# Vaccine Recommendations



- **Flu Vaccine:** Annual flu vaccination is crucial to prevent severe illness, hospitalization, and death.
- **COVID-19 Vaccine:** Regularly updated including new one this fall; helps protect against infection and severe disease.
- **Shingles Vaccine (Shingrix):** For adults aged 50+ to prevent shingles, a painful rash, and post herpetic neuralgia
- **Pneumococcal Vaccine:** Protects against pneumonia and other serious infections, esp. for adults 50+; new forms with broader coverage now available (check with your doctor).
- **RSV (respiratory syncytial virus) Vaccine:** Recommended for all adults 75+ or those who are 60-74 with risk factors
- **Tdap:** A booster shot every 10 years to protect against tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis.



**Consult with your healthcare provider to determine the specific vaccines you need based on your age, medications, and health condition.**

# Special Vaccine Considerations in People with MS

- If you take certain immunosuppressing disease modifying therapies (DMTs), you may need to . . .
- Get vaccinated at a younger age (esp. Shingrix and Pneumococcal vaccine)
- Time your vaccines to increase effectiveness
  - If possible, get vaccinated BEFORE starting treatment
  - If already on DMTs that require infusions every 6 months, usually best time to vaccinate is 2-4 weeks before your next infusion
  - *NOTE: Different timing isn't dangerous but may make the vaccine less effective.*
- Get extra doses of vaccine
  - COVID vaccine recommended more frequently if moderately or severely immunocompromised
- Avoid live vaccines (most recommended vaccines aren't "live")



# CDC's Adult Vaccine Assessment Tool

[cdc.gov/nip/adultimmsched/](https://cdc.gov/nip/adultimmsched/)

## The Adult Vaccine Assessment Tool

[Español \(Spanish\)](#) | [Print](#)

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) met on October 23-24, 2024. ACIP voted to approve the **Recommended Child and Adolescent Immunization Schedule, United States, 2025**, and the **Recommended Adult Immunization Schedule, United States, 2025**. The information on this page is being updated to reflect the 2025 immunization schedules. For more information, please see [ACIP Recent Meeting Recommendations](#).

What **Vaccines**  
do **You** need?



Adults need vaccines too! Answer a few quick questions to find out which vaccines you may need.

# Optimizing Your Health





# 6 Tenets of a Healthy Lifestyle

**Why is lifestyle important?**

**Why should I make any changes?**

# The Toll of Chronic Disease

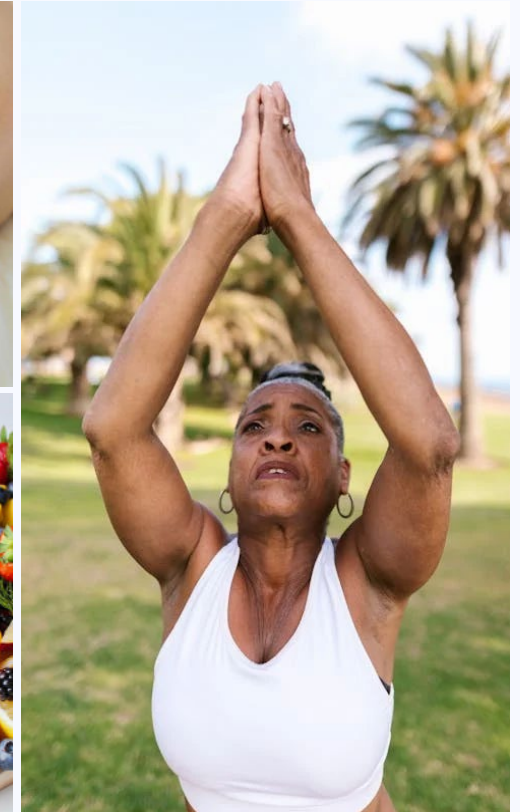
- U.S. life expectancy peaked in 2014, and then began sliding, even before the pandemic
- Chronic disease is primary reason U.S. lags behind other nations
  - Heart disease, cancer remain leading causes of death in people age 35-64
- 41.9% of Americans are obese (up from 30.5% 1999-2000)
- ~50% of Americans have diabetes or pre-diabetes
- Co-morbid chronic disease is more common in people with MS





# Healthy Lifestyle Reduces Chronic Disease

- Healthy habits are linked to better cognitive function and can reduce incidence of coronary heart disease by more than 80% and diabetes by more than 90%:
  - 30 minutes or more of physical activity on most days
  - Avoiding tobacco
  - Healthy diet (esp. more fruits, veggies, whole grains)
  - Maintaining healthy body weight
- Adopting just **ONE(!)** positive behavior can cut the risk of heart disease by half



# Nutrition

- Dietary advice is abundant and CONFUSING
  - especially for MS!
- But, we know the traditional American diet isn't healthy
- A whole-food plant-predominant diet can prevent and potentially reverse many common chronic conditions.
- Specific recommendations:
  - Increase fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, seeds, legumes
  - Reduce or avoid red meat, sugar-sweetened beverages
  - Use olive oil as primary oil for cooking (or no oil)
- Cholesterol is ONLY found in animal products
- Fiber is ONLY found in plants





# Physical Activity

- Reduces negative effects of sedentary behavior
- Lowers risk of cancer, diabetes, heart disease, and others.
- Improves sleep, mood, fitness
- Exercise guidelines for older adults:
  - ✓ 150 or more minutes/week of moderate-intensity aerobic activity (or 75 min/week vigorous exercise)
  - ✓ 2 or more sessions/week resistance exercises involving all major muscle groups
  - ✓ Balance training
- ANY activity is better than none.



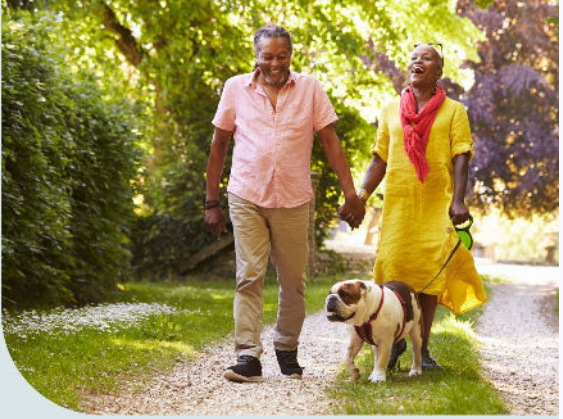
# A Note About Falls

- Falls are the leading cause of fatal and nonfatal injuries in older Americans.
- 1 in 4 adults (not just those with MS) 65 and older falls every year.
  - Over half receive care in a hospital
  - Average cost per inpatient visit for falls is \$18,658.
- Among those with MS, fall incidence is greater than 50%
- Being active – maintaining fitness – reduces risk of falls.

**ncoa** | FallsFree CheckUp  
national council on aging | YOU CAN PREVENT A FALL

**Know your risk of falls and take action!**  
Explore our **#FallsFree CheckUp** today.

[ncoa.org/FallsFreeCheckUp](https://ncoa.org/FallsFreeCheckUp)

A photograph of an elderly couple walking a dog on a path. The man is wearing a light pink shirt and khaki pants, and the woman is wearing a yellow dress and a red scarf. They are holding hands and walking a small dog. The path is surrounded by green trees and foliage.



## Take Control of Your Health: 6 Steps to Prevent a Fall

Every **11 seconds**, an older adult is seen in an emergency department for a fall-related injury. **Many falls are preventable.**  
**Stay safe with these tips!**

To learn more, visit [ncoa.org/FallsPrevention](https://ncoa.org/FallsPrevention).



**1**

### Find a good balance and exercise program

Look to build balance, strength, and flexibility. Contact your local Area Agency on Aging for referrals. Find a program you like and take a friend.



**2**

### Talk to your health care provider

Ask for an assessment of your risk of falling. Share your history of recent falls.



**3**

### Regularly review your medications with your doctor or pharmacist

Make sure side effects aren't increasing your risk of falling. Take medications only as prescribed.



**4**

### Get your vision and hearing checked annually and update your eyeglasses

Your eyes and ears are key to keeping you on your feet.



**5**

### Keep your home safe

Remove tripping hazards, increase lighting, make stairs safe, and install grab bars in key areas.



**6**

### Talk to your family members

Enlist their support in taking simple steps to stay safe. Falls are not just a seniors' issue.



# Are you 65 or older?

Here's how much physical activity you need:



## At least:

### 150 MINUTES PER WEEK

of moderate intensity activity such as 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week  
For example: Water aerobics or brisk walking.



### 2 DAYS PER WEEK

of activities that strengthen muscles  
For example: Lifting weights or heavy gardening, such as digging or shoveling.



### BALANCE-IMPROVING ACTIVITIES

For example: Standing on one leg or practicing standing up from a sitting position.

**Try activities that combine all 3 areas!**

For example: Dancing or yoga.



# Medical Clearance



Before launching a new exercise regimen, talk to your healthcare provider about what activities are safe for you.

Use caution if you have:

- Chronic or unstable health condition(s), such as heart disease, asthma, diabetes, high blood pressure, or osteoporosis
- Unexplained symptoms, especially dizziness, balance problems, chest pain or breathing difficulties
- A recent medical procedure
- Significantly overweight
- Take medications that make you dizzy, drowsy or have other side effects that could impact activity



Consider working with a physical activity specialist certified exercise specialist or exercise physiologist to find the safest and most reliable way to begin.



# Stress Management

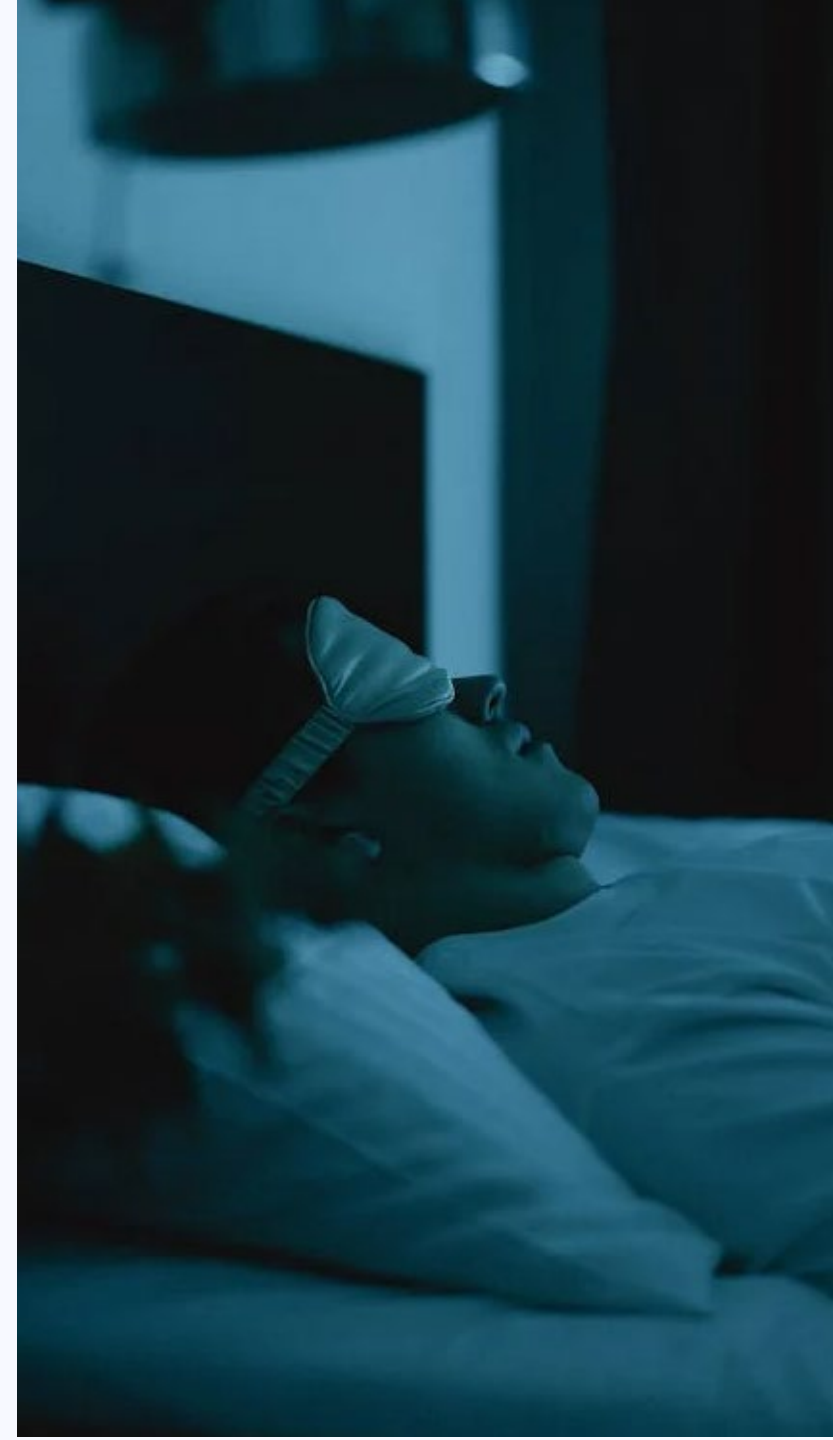
- Stress can increase productivity, but too much can lead to anxiety, depression, obesity, immune system problems, and more.
- Stress is inevitable, but we can control our response
- Stress management strategies:
  - Relaxation: music, exercise, dance, yoga
  - Take time for fun, hobbies
  - Practice gratitude
  - Journaling
  - Meditation: Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)
  - Counseling
  - Incorporate the other pillars of health into your life!





# Restorative Sleep

- Sleep disturbances increase with age, raising fall risk, mood disorders, fatigue, insulin resistance, inattention and more
- Aim for 7-9 hours of sleep each night
- Address underlying conditions: sleep apnea, pain, anxiety, and others.
- Don't automatically turn to sleeping pills
- Avoid caffeine in afternoon and evening
- Don't use alcohol to fall asleep
- Remember sleep hygiene:
  - ✓ Establish regular sleep schedule
  - ✓ Use bed for sleep (and sex) only
  - ✓ If can't sleep after 20 min, get out of bed and do a quiet activity
- Optimize sleep environment



# Social Connection

- Isolation raises the risk of chronic conditions, mental health problems, early death.
- Positive social relationships improve physical, mental, and emotional health.
- Recommendations:
  - Prioritize important relationships
  - Reconnect with old friends
  - Look for ways to meet new people:
    - ✓ Volunteer
    - ✓ Take a class
    - ✓ Get involved in social gatherings ("meet ups"), church, or place of worship
    - ✓ Get to know your neighbors



# Avoidance of Risky Substances

- Tobacco, excessive alcohol increase risk of chronic disease and death.
- Risks of marijuana: addiction, impaired attention & memory, heart attack, stroke, lung problems
- Recommendations:
  - -If you smoke, you can still benefit from quitting at any age
  - -Adults 65 or older: Avoid or limit alcohol to no more than 1 drink per day
  - Consider interactions of substances with other medications
  - To address a problem, enlist help from your doctor, friends and family, a counselor or support group



**It's never too late to adopt a healthy habit.**

# Healthy Lifestyle Resources

## CONNECTION:

Meet-ups around the country: <https://www.meetup.com/>

MS support groups (in-person and virtual):  
<https://www.nationalmssociety.org/resources/get-support/find-support-groups-and-programs>

## EXERCISE:

Can Do MS (variety of exercise videos on strength, balance, mobility) <https://cando-ms.org/>

Silver Sneakers (free for Medicare Advantage Plan members) <https://tools.silversneakers.com/>

Fit and Strong: <https://www.fitandstrong.org/>

AARP's free online group classes  
<https://www.aarp.org/health/healthy-living/staying-fit/>

CDC: Physical Activity for People with Disability:  
<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/feature/s/physical-activity-for-all.html>

## NUTRITION:

- Food as Medicine Jumpstart: <https://lifestylemedicine.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/ACLM-Food-As-Medicine-Jumpstart-8.5x11.pdf>
- Forks Over Knives (film and plant-based recipes): <https://www.forksoverknives.com/>
- Harvard Healthy Eating Plate (guide for creating healthy, balanced meals): <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/healthy-eating-plate/>
- How Not to Die (book, cookbook, and website): <https://nutritionfacts.org/>
- Old Ways (provides recipes and eating tips based on African, Asian, Latin American, and Mediterranean traditions): <https://oldwayspt.org/>
- Whole Food Plant Based Eating Plan (on a budget): <https://lifestylemedicine.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Eating-on-Budget.pdf>

## SLEEP:

American Academy of Sleep Medicine's healthy sleep tips:  
<https://sleepeducation.org/healthy-sleep/healthy-sleep-habits/>

## VACCINES:

CDC's Adult Vaccine Assessment Tool:  
<https://www2.cdc.gov/nip/adultimmsched/>

Q+A



# CONNECT WITH US

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**NEXT WEBINAR:**

# Beneath the Surface

Understanding Invisible Symptoms of MS

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