How Does Aging Affect My MS and Vice Versa?

CAN DO MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

WEBINAR WEDNESDAYS

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APRIL PROGRAMS

Thursday, April 16
JUMPSTART
MS and Aging: Living Your Best Life

Tuesday, April 21
NEWLY DIAGNOSED MEETUPS
Your Choices Matter: Impacting Your Future with MS

Tuesday, April 28
YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED
Sorting Out Symptoms: MS or Aging

Wednesday, April 29
MS MOVES MEETUPS

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How to Ask Questions During the Webinar

Type in your questions using the Questions Box

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Closed captioning

YOUR SPEAKERS

Sam Balistreri

Physical Therapist

Pennsylvania

Alyx Rossi

Nurse Practitioner

Texas

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Learn ways that aging impacts the brain and brain functions
2. Understand the role of co-morbid health conditions in aging and MS
3. Learn how to function optimally regardless of the cause(s) of change

Is this MS, aging, or something else?

Have you ever wondered:

- Is this symptom from my MS?
- Is it just aging?
- Or is something else going on?

This question is incredibly common

How Aging Affects the Brain

As we age, the brain naturally changes:

Slower processing speed

Reduced repair capacity

Changes in immune function

Slight memory changes

This happens **with or without MS**

Aging of Immune System (Simplified)

What is immunosenescence?

- The immune system becomes less responsive with age
- In a *select* MS patient populations, this can mean reduced likelihood for new disease activity
- Healing and repair take longer, less neuroplasticity

Chromosome Changes

It’s not just our immune cells that change as we age

- Chromosomes are the long, thread-like structures made up of DNA that carry our genetic information.
- Over our lifetime, as cells divide, these telomeres get shorter. This shortening can happen more quickly in people with MS than it does in normal ageing.
- Shorter telomeres have been linked to higher disability levels and a reduction in brain volume (atrophy).

Aging Brain vs. MS Brain

Both aging and MS affect:

- Nerve repair
- Myelin health
- Brain volume
- Cognitive efficiency

This is why symptoms can **overlap**.

POLLING QUESTION

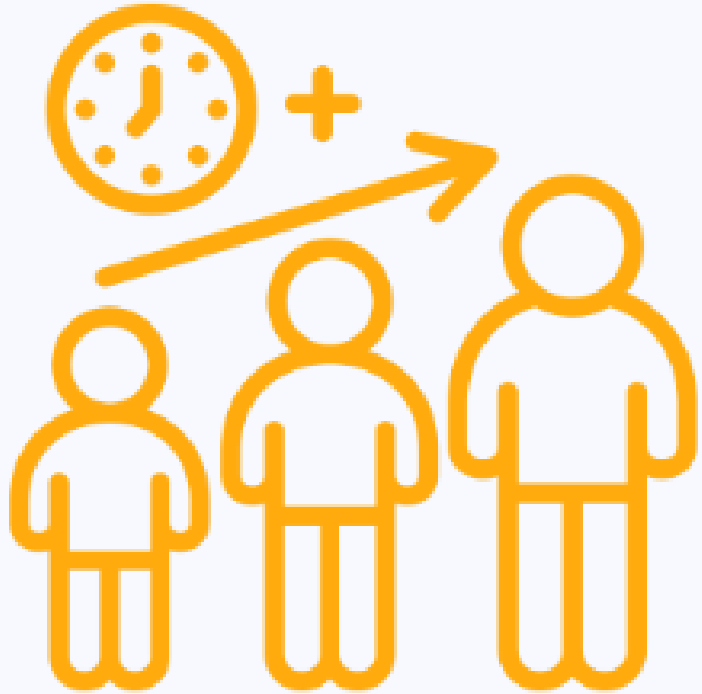
What change have you noticed most over time?

a) Physical stamina
b) Memory or thinking speed
c) Balance or mobility
d) Fatigue
e) Mood or stress tolerance
f) Other (write it in the chat!)

How MS Changes With Age

In general:

- Relapses often decrease with age
- Progression may increase
- Inflammation becomes less dominant
- Neurodegeneration becomes more important



Mobility and Physical Function

As we age:

- Muscle mass declines (sarcopenia)
- Balance changes
- Endurance decreases

When MS is present, these changes can compound each other

Fall Risk

Why falls increase:

- Weakness
- Balance issues
- Slower reaction time
- Medication side effects

Falls are preventable and manageable

The Hidden Layer: Comorbidities

Not Everything Is MS

Many symptoms people attribute to MS may be caused by:

- Heart disease
- Diabetes
- Thyroid disorders
- Sleep apnea

- Depression
- Medication effects
- Perimenopause/ menopause
- Deconditioning

POLLING QUESTION

Have you ever had a symptom blamed on MS that turned out to be something else?

a) Yes

b) No

c) Unsure

Why Comorbidities Matter

These conditions can:

- Worsen fatigue
- Affect mobility
- Impact cognition
- Accelerate disability

Managing them can significantly improve quality of life.

Treatment and Aging

MS Medications and Aging

Emerging reserach questions

- Do DMTs work as we age?
- When should treatments continue or stop?
- What are the risks of infection?

The studies:

- DISCO-MS Study
- ESCALATE Research

Key Message

This is a highly individualized decision between you and your neurologist.

The Positive Side: Healthy Aging with MS

Brain Health Is Possible

Even with MS, many things support healthy aging:

Physical Activity

Sleep Quality

Cognitive Engagement

Social Connection

Managing Cardiovascular Health

Mental Health

Diet and Aging with MS

Research suggests that what you eat may help with some MS symptoms—especially fatigue and overall quality of life.

Unprocessed or minimally processed food

Natural foods or those with minimal changes (e.g., cut, ground, pasteurized).

Processed culinary ingredients

Basic ingredients used in cooking, made from whole foods (e.g., oil, sugar, salt).

Processed foods

Foods made by adding ingredients like salt, sugar, or oil to whole foods.

Ultra-processed foods

Highly manufactured foods with added flavors, colors, and other additives.

Brain Reserve

The brain can build resistance through:

POLLING QUESTION

Which area would you most like to improve in the next year?

a) Physical activity
b) Cognitive health
c) Sleep
d) Stress management
e) Social connection

Not everything you experience is MS

Sometimes it's:

- **Aging**
- **Another health condition**
- **Lifestyle factors**

Understanding the difference helps you focus on what you can change

Aging with MS is not just about decline

It’s about:

- Adaptation
- Prevention
- Resilience
- Partnership with your care team

Links to Can Do Resources

- Fatigue
- Mobility
- Cognition
- Care team communication tools

Q+A

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Therapy Approaches To Help You Thrive with MS

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