



Understanding MS: A Guide to Your Diagnosis and Treatment

CAN DO
MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

UNDERSTANDING MS AND TREATMENTS

WHAT MS IS AND WHAT IT IS NOT

- ★ **What it is:** A chronic, unpredictable autoimmune disease of the central nervous system (CNS – brain and spinal cord).
- ★ In MS, the immune system targets cells and tissues in the CNS causing inflammation and damage, provoking temporary or permanent symptoms. MS usually begins with a relapsing remitting pattern and over time often becomes more progressive with fewer relapses.
- ★ **What it is not:** MS is not fatal, directly inherited, or guaranteed to cause severe disability. It does not prevent living an active, fulfilling life, or starting a family.

[ACCESS YOUR GUIDE TO MS](#)

HOW MS IS DIAGNOSED

- Medical history and neurological exam
- MRI scans to detect brain and spinal cord lesions
- Blood tests to rule out other conditions
- Spinal fluid analysis to identify immune activity and exclude other diagnoses



COMMON SYMPTOMS

- Fatigue
- Vision changes
- Pain
- Impaired mobility
- Bowel & bladder dysfunction
- Numbness and tingling
- Weakness
- Imbalance and stiffness
- Cognitive and mood changes



DISEASE-MODIFYING THERAPIES (DMTs)

OVERVIEW OF DMTs

- ★ DMTs are medications designed to reduce inflammation, prevent relapses, and slow disease progression.
- ★ While DMTs cannot cure MS, they help protect your future and manage disease activity.
- ★ Starting a DMT early in the disease course is crucial to limit new MS activity and disease progression.



WHAT DMTs CAN DO

DMTs target the immune system to reduce attacks on the central nervous system. They come in various forms, including pills, self administered injections, clinician administered injections and infusions.



WHAT DMTs CANNOT DO

Cure MS or stop disease activity entirely. They also don't affect existing symptoms.



SIDE EFFECTS AND RISKS

Like all medications, it's possible you will experience side effects, which may vary depending on the medication. These are important topics to discuss with your healthcare provider so you are clear when participating in your treatment decision.



MONITORING TREATMENT

Regular check-ups and tests are essential to track progress and adjust, if needed.

[LEARN MORE ABOUT DISEASE MODIFYING THERAPIES](#)

MAKING YOUR DECISIONS ABOUT TREATMENT

MAKING YOUR VOICE COUNT

Better outcomes result from collaboration with your healthcare team. Take time to look at the available resources, understand your options and discuss them with trusted partners.



REMEMBER, YOU'RE AT THE CENTER OF YOUR CARE TEAM. EMPOWER YOURSELF WITH KNOWLEDGE, ASK QUESTIONS, AND ADVOCATE FOR THE SUPPORT YOU NEED.

CONSIDERATIONS TO SHARE WITH YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER

- ☒ What are your personal goals and how does your DMT choice impact those goals?
- ☒ Are there aspects of treatment (e.g., side effects or administration) that concern you?
- ☒ Do you need financial planning assistance or a DMT financial assistance program?

COLLABORATING WITH YOUR CARE TEAM

- Your healthcare provider understands MS and treatment options. You understand you. Share your priorities, lifestyle, and concerns to make informed decisions together. Ask questions!
- Don't hesitate to seek a second opinion or additional resources to help you feel confident in your choice.

INVOLVING YOUR LOVED ONES

- Discuss treatment decisions with your support system, including family, friends, or care partners. Their involvement can help manage challenges, provide support and additional perspective about your symptoms.

[SIGN UP FOR A NEWLY DIAGNOSED MEETUP](#)

GETTING THE ANSWERS YOU NEED



QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER

- How long do I need to take a DMT for? Will I ever be able to stop taking it?
- How will we decide which DMT is best for me?
- What happens if I choose not to take a DMT?
- Are there specific tests or pre-medication needed before and during treatment? If so, how often?
- What are the differences in effectiveness, side effects and risks of the DMTs?
- What are the impacts of the DMTs on family planning?
- What are the impacts of the DMTs on infections and immunizations?
- How do we know if the DMT is working? What happens if it isn't?
- Are all DMTs covered by my insurance? What financial assistance is available?
- How do I obtain my DMT?



TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE HEALTHCARE VISITS

- Start to build relationships with your team, including health care providers, before any issues arise.
- Prepare a prioritized list of questions and concerns for your appointments.
- Bring a friend or family member to take notes or bring your phone to record important details.
- Prioritize a doctor who values your needs and listens to your goals. If a provider avoids questions, tough topics, or second opinions, advocate for one that makes you comfortable and heard.

NEW TO MS? LET'S GET STARTED

TAKE US WITH YOU



Whether you're on a walk or taking a break, our podcast is here when you need it. Hear from MS experts and real people living with MS. Find everyday living tips, personal stories, and positive motivation.

MY MS STORY



Join Stephanie and Ashley as they share honest, inspiring insights for those newly diagnosed with MS.

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JOIN THE CONVERSATION



Connect with others in the MS community, share your experiences, gain insights and find real support. Follow us and be part of the conversation.



GET ALL THE BEST OF CAN DO MS

Transform the way you live with MS with empowering programs, resources for living with MS, and the latest news on multiple sclerosis delivered to your inbox every month. This newsletter will provide you with the resources you need to live a full and active life while managing your disease.

[Subscribe to Our Monthly Newsletter!](#)

You are in charge!

Living with MS comes with challenges, but you hold the power to shape your path forward. Stay informed, actively participate in your healthcare decisions, and advocate for what you need. Knowledge is your strongest ally! Pharmaceutical companies often provide copay assistance.

Be Prepared:

Write down your questions before each visit.

Stay Curious:

Dive into trusted resources to learn more.

Speak Up:

Share your goals and concerns with your healthcare team.

Explore These Trusted Resources:

CANDO-MS.ORG

Delivers health and wellness education to help families living with MS thrive.

NMSS.ORG

Comprehensive support from the National MS Society.

MYMSAA.ORG

Resources and programs tailored for your journey.