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## Multiple Sclerosis

Multiple sclerosis is a chronic neurological disease that destroys "myelin," a substance that surrounds certain nerves. Scars develop where the healthy myelin used to be, and this "sclerosed" tissue cannot subsequently transmit nerve impulses. When this happens, various parts of the body begin to malfunction. Among the many possible symptoms of MS are weakness, lack of coordination, speech disturbances, impaired vision, and numbness or loss of sensation in certain parts of the body.

Because these symptoms resemble those of many other neurological disorders, it's difficult to diagnose MS. The symptoms of MS can also resemble those of non-neurological disorders, too, such as alcohol intoxication. Since there is no specific diagnostic test for MS, a diagnosis is necessarily based on the observation of a pattern of symptoms that come and go and sometimes get worse as the person ages. Call your health care professional if you experience any symptoms that you think might indicate MS. Bear in mind, however, that it's not usually possible to make this diagnosis quickly.

It's also difficult to predict just how a given person with MS will fare as the disease runs its course. Although MS can get worse over time, some people have had the disease for many years without any worsening. We can say that 75 percent of all patients experience periodic remissions. This means that the symptoms temporarily improve or go away altogether. A relapse is said to occur if the symptoms return, which is not unusual. Still, many people fully recover even after having had a relapse. Others are left with some increased disability. The fact is that 44 percent of all MS victims will fully recover without treatment. Even without a full recovery, most people are able to function and lead fully productive lives.

It's important to note that MS can be aggravated by surgery, overexertion, or other forms of stress to the body. Even being emotionally upset can cause a flare-up of symptoms. Therefore, if you have multiple sclerosis, you should do whatever you can to reduce the stress in your life. You should also get plenty of rest and regular exercise, avoid extremes of heat and cold, and eat a well-balanced diet. Furthermore, seek emotional and practical support from other people in your life. Psychiatric counseling and support may also be of help.

While new treatments and medications are being tested all the time, here are some examples of medications that are currently used:

- Tegretol is used to treat shooting, stabbing pains that can occur.
- Baclofen can be used to decrease spasms.
- Corticosteroids such as Prednisone are sometimes used to help patients get over an attack more

quickly.

- Betaseron and Avonex are used in carefully selected patients to reduce their attacks.
- Amantadine or Pemoline sometimes help the tiredness that MS patients experience.



For additional health information you can trust:

- Log on to our members-only Web site at [www.kaiserpermanente.org/california](http://www.kaiserpermanente.org/california), then click the "Kaiser Permanente Members Only" button
- Visit your local Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center
- Check your Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook
- Listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone messages at 1-800-33 ASK ME (1-800-332-7563)

To get your free Handbook and Healthphone Directory, call 1-800-464-4000.

The information presented here is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of professional medical care. If you have persistent health problems or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor or other health care professional.

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REGIONAL HEALTH EDUCATION