



Spotlight On Disability

Multiple Sclerosis (MS)

Multiple Sclerosis (MS) is a disease of the central nervous system. As you may know from biology classes, the central nervous system includes the brain and spinal cord. The brain and spinal cord are full of nerve fibers, which conduct electrical impulses. These electrical impulses help our bodies communicate with our brains. Tissue called myelin protects these nerve fibers and allows them to do their jobs.

In MS, myelin is lost and scar tissue forms. This scar tissue is called sclerosis. Hence the name "multiple sclerosis."

Because of the scar tissue and the degeneration of the nerve fiber, the nerves cannot communicate with the brain as well as they should. This creates the symptoms of MS. Symptoms can include:

- **Fatigue**
- **Cognitive or thinking problems**
- **Difficulty walking**
- **Balance problems**
- **Vision problems**
- **Dizziness/vertigo**
- **Bladder and bowel problems**

MS is extremely variable, and no one can tell you exactly how it will affect your body. According to the National MS Society, there are four courses of the disease: relapsing-remitting; primary-progressive; secondary-progressive; and progressive-relapsing. The majority of people have relapsing-remitting MS at the time of their diagnosis with the disease. Relapses are flare-ups of the disease, and in relapsing-remitting MS, the disease also goes into remission for periods of time.

No one knows exactly what causes MS, but many researchers believe it is an autoimmune disease. What this means is that your own body's immune system attacks itself. There are numerous other autoimmune disorders, including Lupus, Sarcoidosis and Rheumatoid Arthritis. In MS, your immune system attacks the myelin, researchers say.

Are you at risk for MS? Perhaps. Most of those diagnosed with MS are between 20 and 50 years of age, the National MS Society says. It is much more common in women than men - up to three times more women are diagnosed with MS than men. And if you are of northern European ancestry, this also makes you more likely to be diagnosed with MS.

In America, statistics show about 400,000 people have MS, and about 200 more are diagnosed each week.

For more information about MS, you can call the National MS Society at 1-800-FIGHT-MS (1-800-344-4867). Or, if you have Internet access, go to the following sites: