

# Multiple Sclerosis (MS)

Multiple sclerosis (MS) is an unpredictable and often disabling neurological condition. Canada has one of the highest rates of MS in the world, with 133 out of every 100,000 people affected. The disease is commonly first diagnosed in younger adults, and women are three times more likely to develop MS than men. Symptoms are unpredictable and vary from person to person. MS symptoms can be confusing and can include vision problems, dizziness, tremors, muscle-related symptoms, pain, fatigue, sensory symptoms and cognitive problems. People with MS can have one or many symptoms and these symptoms can improve and relapse many times over.

MS is not contagious and while not inherited, there seems to be a higher incidence of MS for those who have MS in the family. The closer the family relation (e.g., sister vs. cousin), the higher the incidence.

## Causes of MS

The disease attacks the protective covering of the nerves in your brain and spinal cord. The nerve's protective outer coating (called myelin) insulates them and allows impulses/messages to run from your brain, along your nerves, to the muscles that control movement. MS attacks the myelin coating causing inflammation and damage. The damaged areas, called lesions or plaques, interrupt, distort or prevent nerve impulses getting through, thus producing the symptoms of MS. The exact cause of MS is not known, however, current research increasingly points to a complex interplay of environmental and possibly genetic risk factors. Research also shows the tissue damage experienced by those with MS is caused by an abnormal immune response. While there is no cure, there are treatments to help manage most MS symptoms.

## How physiotherapists help

MS affects your ability to move as well as your balance, muscle strength and flexibility. A physiotherapist will first assess how MS is affecting you and your movement. They can then help you maximize your physical movement and functional abilities and teach you compensation strategies like how to move differently and discuss aids/equipment that could help.

Physiotherapists can also help you find appropriate exercise classes or a facility where you can connect with others with MS and practice these exercises.

You may require follow-up advice/expertise from the physiotherapist, including a review of your exercise program and additional or different strategies to address any changes to your symptoms.



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### Your physiotherapist will:

- Help lessen secondary symptoms of MS (weakness, spasticity, reduced endurance) by teaching you three types of exercises:
  - Strengthening exercises to strengthen muscles not affected by MS
  - Flexibility or stretching exercises to reduce spasticity and improve your range of motion
  - Cardio or endurance exercises to help maintain heart and lung health and give you greater endurance when performing everyday activities

