

# National Multiple Sclerosis Society

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## Symptoms

In multiple sclerosis, damage to the myelin in the central nervous system (CNS), and to the nerve fibers themselves, interferes with the transmission of nerve signals between the brain and spinal cord and other parts of the body. This disruption of nerve signals produces the primary symptoms of MS, which vary depending on where the damage has occurred.

Over the course of the disease, some symptoms will come and go, while others may be more lasting.

## Symptoms

### Most Common Symptoms

Some symptoms of MS are much more common than others.

#### Fatigue

#### Numbness

#### Walking (Gait), Balance, & Coordination Problems

#### Bladder Dysfunction

#### Bowel Dysfunction

#### Vision Problems

#### Dizziness and Vertigo

#### Sexual Dysfunction

#### Pain

#### Cognitive Function

#### Emotional Changes

#### Depression

#### Spasticity

### Less Common Symptoms

These symptoms also occur in MS, but much less frequently.

#### Speech Disorders

#### Swallowing Problems

#### Headache

#### Hearing Loss

## Seizures

## Tremor

## Respiration / Breathing Problems

## Itching

## MS Symptoms are Variable and Unpredictable

No two people have exactly the same symptoms, and each person's symptoms can change or fluctuate over time. One person might experience only one or two of the possible symptoms while another person experiences many more.

Most of these symptoms can be managed very effectively with medication, rehabilitation, and other management strategies.

## "Secondary" Symptoms of MS

While the primary symptoms described on this page are the direct result of damage to the myelin and nerve fibers in the CNS, the secondary symptoms are the complications that can arise as a result of the primary symptoms.

For example:

- Bladder dysfunction can cause repeated urinary tract infections.
- Inactivity can result in loss of muscle tone and disuse weakness (not related to demyelination), poor postural alignment and trunk control, decreased bone density (and resulting increased risk of fracture), and shallow, inefficient breathing
- Immobility can lead to pressure sores.

While secondary symptoms can be treated, the optimal goal is to avoid them by treating the primary symptoms.