

Diagnosis and Treatment of MS

Tools for making an MS diagnosis

There is no specific diagnostic test for MS. To make a diagnosis, there must be evidence of damage in at least two separate areas of the central nervous system (CNS) and evidence that the areas of damage occurred at two different points in time. Also, other possible diagnoses must be excluded. To determine these the healthcare provider will:

- **Take your medical history** to identify any past or present symptoms that might be caused by MS.
- **Gather information** about birthplace, family history, environmental exposures, history of other illnesses, and places traveled that might provide further clues.
- **Perform a comprehensive neurologic exam**, which includes tests of cranial nerves (vision, hearing, facial sensation, strength, swallowing), sensation of the limbs, reflexes coordination, walking, and balance.
- **Use magnetic resonance imaging (MRI)** of the brain, and possibly also spinal cord, to look for evidence of lesions.
- **Order blood tests** to consider other possible diagnoses as a cause of the symptoms.
- **Determine if a lumbar puncture (spinal tap)** to identify evidence of abnormal immune activity is needed.

Treating MS - comprehensive MS care

- **Modifying the disease course.** Initiation of treatment with disease-modifying medications (DMTs) can reduce the number and severity of relapses, limit the number of new lesions seen on MRI, and delay disease progression.
- **Treating relapses.** A relapse is the appearance of new or worsening neurologic symptoms that lasts at least 24 hours and is caused by inflammation in the CNS. Relapses may be treated with high-dose steroids to accelerate recovery. Recovery will happen spontaneously without steroids, but more slowly.
- **Managing symptoms.** A combination of lifestyle modification, rehabilitation, and medications is used to optimally manage symptoms.
- **Rehabilitation.** Physical therapists, occupational therapists, speech/language pathologists, and others focus on safety, functional mobility, exercise, energy conservation, speech and swallowing, and other functions.
- **Providing emotional support.** Mental health professionals provide education and support,

and diagnose and treat mood and cognitive changes.

- **Healthy lifestyle.** Regular physical activity, stopping smoking, limiting alcohol, eating a healthy diet, and reducing the risk of other conditions such as obesity, high blood pressure, cardiac disease, and diabetes can contribute to improved health outcomes.
- **Note: Early diagnosis and early treatment may minimize future disability.**