

## What you need to know about Multiple Sclerosis

Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a disease that causes the body's immune system to attack the protective coating around nerve fibers in the central nervous system. The exact cause of MS is unknown. Scientists believe that unknown environmental factors trigger MS in people who are genetically predisposed to respond. MS affects the brain, optic nerves, and spinal cord.

MS is estimated to cost the United States more than \$85 billion a year. In a study published by the U.S. National Library of Medicine of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the total health care costs for an MS patient can be up to \$88,487 a year (American Academy of Neurology, 2022).

To avoid these high costs and also slow the progression of the disease, it is important that you follow your doctor's orders and take your medication exactly how your doctor prescribed it.

### Why is taking my medication important?

Your doctor has said that you need to take this medication. What does it do? Why should you take it? Taking MS drugs as prescribed may reduce one or more of the following:

- Number of new lesions shown on magnetic resonance imaging (MRI)
- Number of exacerbations (also called relapses, attacks, or flare-ups)
- Progression of the disability
- Future disease activity

## Why start treatment now?

Research indicates that permanent damage may occur in the central nervous system even before someone starts experiencing any symptoms.

Medicine slows disease progression, decreases exacerbations, and can help lower the number of attacks and their severity. By slowing the disease progression, you slow the damage to the brain.

## Reluctant to start treatment?

We understand that starting therapy can be scary. Let's explore some of the reasons you might hesitate:

- **Absence of symptoms.** Not experiencing symptoms yet? Research shows that the disease can cause significant, irreversible damage in your nervous system even if you aren't experiencing any symptoms. Patients should start therapy as soon as diagnosed, regardless of symptom severity (National Multiple Sclerosis Society, 2023).
- **Fear of needles.** Many people hate needles. Your PerformSpecialty nurse can help you learn how to self-inject comfortably.
- **Fear of side effects.** Most medications have side effects. MS medications do, too. Some patients experience only injection-site reactions. Others may experience temporary symptoms that can feel like a mild flu. Some people – particularly those whose MS symptoms are mild or in remission – may hesitate to take a medication that could make them feel worse rather than better. However, your doctor and your stePS nurse can give you tips and strategies to reduce the side effects and make them more manageable. Most side effects diminish over time.

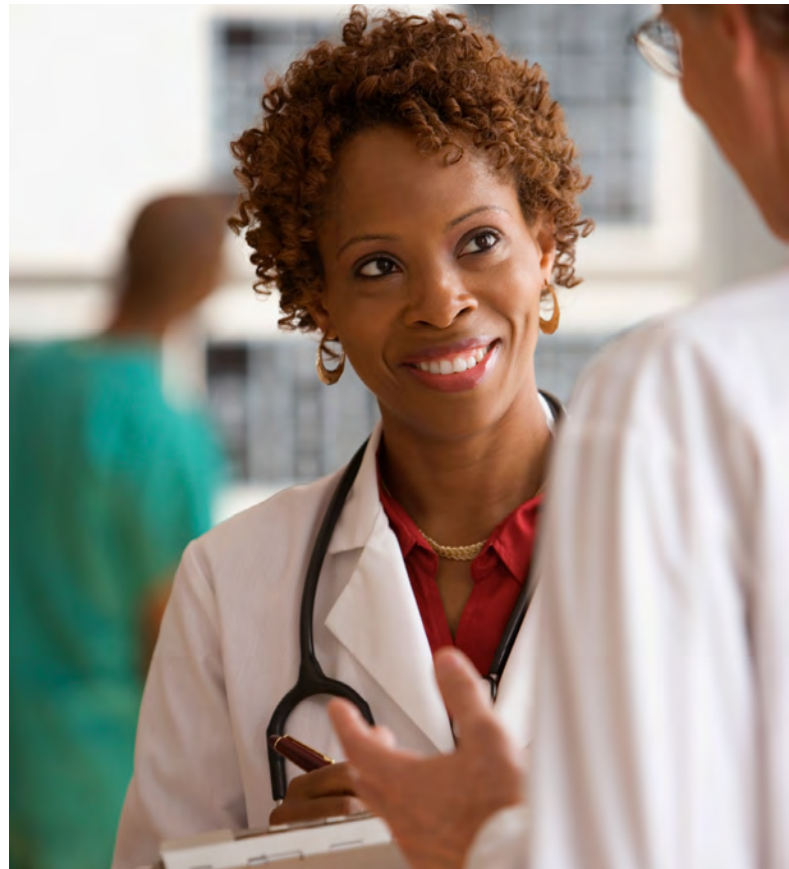
Remember, you can always talk to your stePS nurse at PerformSpecialty about any concerns you have.

## Staying on track

Taking the medication as prescribed is the most important way to help manage MS. These medications can help slow the disease.

Since MS is a lifelong condition, treatment is also lifelong. Your stePS nurse will support you while you get used to your therapy. Drugs to treat MS may include weekly or daily shots. Some drugs can be taken by mouth. Regardless of how you treat your condition, you should do your best not to miss any doses. Otherwise, your MS symptoms may worsen and the condition will progress.

Remember, MS can damage your body even if you don't feel it. MS drugs can limit this harm. Even if you can't see or feel a difference, your therapy may be slowing the progression of your MS.



## Exercise/rehabilitation

Exercise can help you manage many MS symptoms and is essential to general health and well-being. A 2017 study demonstrated the effects of an individualized aerobic exercise plan in MS patients. The study showed that aerobic exercise improved fitness, functional capacity, muscle strength, and quality of life (BMC Neurology, 2017).

### **The goal of rehabilitation is to improve and maintain function – it's essential!**

Rehabilitation specialists are there to help you improve and maintain function. This is an essential component of MS care. Your doctor will help you build a team of specialists who can help promote good health and reduce fatigue.

Your rehabilitation may include physical therapy, occupational therapy, cognitive rehabilitation, speech-language pathology, and more. These specialists can help if your symptoms start to interfere with everyday activities like mobility, dressing, and personal care. They can also help with the evaluation and treatment of speech and swallowing difficulties, and/or problems with thinking and memory.

Talk to your doctor before starting a new exercise program.





## Nutritional education

There is no specific diet for MS, but it is important to stay in good health. When healthy, your body has an easier time coping with your condition. Fatigue is a common MS-related symptom, which can affect the way you eat. When people are tired, they may skip meals or rely on fast food. Over time, this can cause nutrient deficiencies.

Make mealtime easier by stocking your kitchen with healthy food that is easy to cook.

### The MS-friendly kitchen should contain foods like:

- **Frozen vegetables.** Choose the vegetables you like. Then, just pop them in the microwave or heat them on the stove.
- **Rice.** Rice is simple to prepare and can be cooked in less than 20 minutes. Brown rice is better than white rice because it has more fiber. Wild rice may be the best choice as it is a good source of fiber, folate, magnesium, phosphorus, manganese, zinc, vitamin B6, and niacin. Wild rice also provides more protein than most other whole grains.
- **Whole-grain crackers or rice cakes.** Foods with whole grains keep you full longer.
- **In-season fruits and vegetables.** These items are usually cheaper and fresher than out-of-season items.

- **Pre-cut vegetables and fruits and bagged salads.** You don't have to chop anything. Just open the bag and pour into a bowl.
- **Peanut butter.** Peanut butter has great protein content, and you can use it in many different meals. Try it with bananas or apples, on bread, or with celery.
- **Omega-3 fatty acids.** The National MS Society reports that omega-3s have been the focus of MS studies, with some evidence pointing to benefits for relapsing or remitting MS. Omega-3s can be found in large quantities in certain fatty fish such as salmon, mackerel, herring, and sardines, and in fish oil products. The highest amounts can be found in fish oil supplements, while smaller amounts are in canola oil, flaxseed, and walnuts. A daily dose of 3 grams is considered safe for most people.

### Tips for preparing meals

- **Plan ahead.** Try baking several chicken breasts instead of just enough for one meal. You can also roast a pan full of vegetables in the oven. This way you have lunch prepared for the rest of the week. What's more, you are making healthy decisions
- **Ask your family and friends to help.** Grocery shopping may leave you tired. Don't be afraid to ask your family or friends to help you.
- **Spend less energy.** Try sitting while you prepare your food. This will help you save energy for other things you want to do.

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#### Resources:

American Academy of Neurology, 2022. <https://n.neurology.org/content/98/18/e1810>.

What is Multiple Sclerosis? National Multiple Sclerosis Society. Available at [www.nationalmssociety.org/What-is-MS/Definition-of-MS](http://www.nationalmssociety.org/What-is-MS/Definition-of-MS).

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Staying on MS Treatment. MS Active Source. Available at [www.msactivesource.com/msasProject/msas.portal/\\_baseUrl/threeColLayout/MSASRepository/en\\_US/msas/home/experienced-with-ms/staying-on-treatment.xml](http://www.msactivesource.com/msasProject/msas.portal/_baseUrl/threeColLayout/MSASRepository/en_US/msas/home/experienced-with-ms/staying-on-treatment.xml).

Diet, Exercise, and Healthy Behaviors. National MS Society. <https://www.nationalmssociety.org/Living-Well-With-MS/Diet-Exercise-Healthy-Behaviors>.

Vitamin-D, Biotin, and Omega-3. National MS Society. <https://www.nationalmssociety.org/Living-Well-With-MS/Diet-Exercise-Healthy-Behaviors/Diet-Nutrition/Omega3>.

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## Contact us

### PerformSpecialty

2416 Lake Orange Drive, Suite 190  
Orlando, FL 32837

1-855-287-7888

[info@performspecialty.com](mailto:info@performspecialty.com)



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