

## Multiple sclerosis

### What is it?

Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a condition affecting the nerves of your brain and spinal cord. Your brain and spinal cord are called your central nervous system (CNS). In MS, the 'myelin sheath' which protects some of your nerves becomes damaged – this is called 'demyelination'. Demyelination of a nerve stops it working properly and can cause weakness, numbness, changes in vision and more symptoms. Most people with MS will also develop fatigue and mobility problems.

There are two different patterns of MS:

1. **relapsing-remitting** – where symptoms come (relapses) and go (remissions)
2. **progressive** – where symptoms get worse more slowly, without improvement

Most people with relapsing-remitting MS will eventually develop progressive MS as well.

### Treatments for MS

There is no cure for MS. Steroid medications can be given in relapses of MS to speed remission; they do not affect disease progression. Disease-modifying therapies (DMTs) can reduce the number of relapses and slow down progression of disease for some people. You should discuss your suitability for DMT with a neurologist or MS-specialist nurse.

Haematopoietic stem cell transplantation (HSCT) can be attempted in some patients who have not been helped by DMT, which can also reduce the number of relapses and slow disease progression.

### What are the alternatives?

Many symptoms of MS can be improved by medicines; you should discuss new or worsening symptoms with your MS-specialist nurse:

- **Regular exercise**, especially aerobic, balance or resistance can reduce fatigue and some causes of pain.
- **Stopping smoking** can reduce the speed at which symptoms worsen.
- **Vaccinations** reduce the risk of infections, which can worsen MS symptoms.
- **Healthy diet** is known to improve overall health and may improve fatigue.
- **Wellbeing techniques** including mindfulness can improve fatigue

### What are my rights and responsibilities?

#### Rights

- **Social care** – you have the right to a care needs assessment by East Sussex County Council to assess if you need support at home, including if your MS is affecting your children. <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/social-care-and-support-guide>
- **Employment** – you have a right not to be discriminated against because of your MS. <https://www.mssociety.org.uk/living-with-ms/newly-diagnosed/ms-and-your-rights>

- **Benefits** – you may be entitled to financial support depending on the impact your MS has on you. Local individualised, independent advice may be available through referral by your MS-nurse.

### Responsibilities

- **Driving** – You must inform the DVLA if you are diagnosed with MS. You can do this through the gov.uk website. <https://www.gov.uk/multiple-sclerosis-and-driving>

### Sources of information

- Our MS-specialist nurse service. First point of contact for MS-related health needs.
- Social care services through East Sussex County Council.
- National charities providing reliable information on MS and contributing to ongoing research into the disease:

#### **MS Society -**

[www.mssociety.org.uk](http://www.mssociety.org.uk)

0808 800 8000

#### **MS Trust -**

[www.mstrust.org.uk](http://www.mstrust.org.uk)

01462 476700

- Online community for people with multiple sclerosis.

#### **Shift.ms**

<http://www.shift.ms>

## Important information

The information in this leaflet is for guidance purposes only and is not provided to replace professional clinical advice from a qualified practitioner.

## Your comments

We are always interested to hear your views about our leaflets. If you have any comments, please contact the patient experience team on 0300 131 4784 or [esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net](mailto:esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net).

## Hand hygiene

We are committed to maintaining a clean, safe environment. Hand hygiene is very important in controlling infection. Alcohol gel is widely available at the patient bedside for staff use and at the entrance of each clinical area for visitors to clean their hands before and after entering.

## Other formats

**If you require any of our leaflets in alternative formats, such as large print or alternative languages, please contact the Equality and Human Rights Department on 0300 131 4434 or [esh-tr.AccessibleInformation@nhs.net](mailto:esh-tr.AccessibleInformation@nhs.net)**

After reading this information are there any questions you would like to ask? Please list below and ask your nurse or doctor.

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## Reference

The following clinicians have been consulted and agreed this patient information:

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The directorate group that has agreed this patient information leaflet:

ENTER NAME HERE, IF APPROPRIATE

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