

Consumer health: What do you know about multiple sclerosis?

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MS Awareness Week will be observed March 13-19, which makes this a good time to learn about multiple sclerosis, or MS.

Nearly 1 million people are living with MS in the U.S., according to the National Multiple Sclerosis Society.

MS is a potentially disabling disease of the brain and spinal cord. With MS, the [immune system](#) attacks the protective sheath that covers nerve fibers, and causes [communication problems](#) between your brain and the rest of your body. Eventually, the disease can cause the nerves to deteriorate or become permanently damaged. There is no cure for MS.

MS can occur at any age, but onset usually occurs around 20-40. White people, particularly those of Northern European descent, are at highest risk of developing MS. People of Asian, African or Native American descent have the lowest risk.

Signs and symptoms of MS can differ greatly from person to person and over the course of the disease, depending on the location of affected [nerve fibers](#). Some people with severe MS may lose the ability to walk independently or at all, while others may experience long periods of remission without any new symptoms.

Most people with MS have a relapsing-remitting disease course. This means that they experience periods of new symptoms or relapses that develop over days or weeks, and usually improve partially or completely. These relapses are followed by quiet periods of disease remission that can last months or even years. Women are more than two to three times as likely as men to have relapsing-remitting MS.

Treatment typically focuses on speeding recovery from attacks, slowing the progression of the disease and managing symptoms. Several lifestyle strategies also can relieve symptoms of MS.

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