



When patients talk with their doctor about symptoms they're experiencing, practitioners will often inquire about any bladder problems, mood changes or cognitive impairment, as these can be early signs of MS.

## Diagnosis

Unlike Adrienne, most people with MS are diagnosed between the ages of 15 and 40; however, individuals can receive a diagnosis much earlier or later, depending on the severity of the disease.

To first diagnose MS, a medical doctor (MD) will obtain a full medical history and will complete extensive neurological exams. These tests will assess the patient's ability to think and move. Both mental ability and emotional condition are important in the diagnosis of the disease, along with coordination, strength, senses and reflexes. There are many tests and examinations which are necessary to identify MS. It can sometimes take months or even years for an individual suspected of MS to receive a diagnosis because symptoms must include evidence of disease-activity separated by time and space.

Once a patient is suspected of having MS, they will be put through one or more diagnostic tests to confirm and the stage of disease. A Medical Resonance Imaging (MRI) exam is typically used for further testing. "An MRI is a medical imaging technique commonly used in radiology to visualize the internal function and structure of the body," says the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada. MRI exams provide images of areas in the central nervous system that may be damaged. On MRI studies these may show up as bright spots in the brain or spinal cord.



## Treatment

There is no cure for Multiple Sclerosis. There are, however, medications which can control and suppress certain types of MS. Individuals living with the disease can talk to their MD about treatments that help control or lessen the symptoms.

### Medications

Doctors will often prescribe medications to a patient diagnosed with MS. The key to medication is to start the treatment early. Early detection and treatment will prevent further damage to the nerve cells as they will help reduce the frequency and severity of the relapses, which further injure myelin.

Medication is most effective in early MS, as inflammation plays a lesser role in the disease process once it has progressed. Once the damage is done to the nerves it typically cannot be reversed.

### Disease-modifying Therapies

There are a class of drugs, called disease-modifying therapies, which target some aspect of the inflammation, reduce the frequency and severity of MS relapses, reduce the number of new lesions on the brain and spinal cord found on an MRI, and slow down the disabilities caused by the disease.

Although disease-modifying therapies are great, they only help treat early forms of MS. Unfortunately, there are currently no disease-modifying therapies for primary-progressive MS.

## Other Treatments and Resources

Individuals living with MS are encouraged to keep an open and ongoing conversation with their doctor, as they may suggest treatments in development, a change in lifestyle and encourage well-being, rehabilitation, or participating in clinical trials.

## Words of Wisdom



“I guess if I could tell someone who has just been diagnosed with MS anything,” MacDonald says, “I would highly recommend families reach out to the MS Society of Canada and ask for help. Educating the family...is so beneficial for everyone.” MacDonald says. “My diagnosis gave me a lot of answers. I finally knew why I was so tired all of the time... I finally could seek out information on how to make myself better because I knew what was wrong. That was a gift.”

If you or someone you know is suffering from MS, you can find useful resources and support from the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada or the MS International Federation.

World MS Day is on May 31, 2017. Please check out the World MS Day website to learn how you can help in the fight against Multiple Sclerosis.