

Life with MS:

Mastering Early Treatment



MASTERING



Multiple Sclerosis

Essential Information About MS

Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a disease that attacks the central nervous system (CNS). Approximately 2.5 million people worldwide and 400,000 people in the U.S. have MS. MS occurs more frequently in women than in men, and the onset of MS is typically around age 30.

MS usually progresses over time, but early diagnosis and treatment may help slow disease progression. It is important that people recognize the symptoms of MS as early as possible. Research has found that starting treatment after the first clinical attack suggestive of MS could slow disease progression. One of the most important things someone with MS can do is start treatment early and then stay committed to it over the long term.

About *Mastering MS*

Mastering MS is a global awareness program that illustrates how chronic diseases like MS can affect a person's personal relationships and work life, whether as a spouse, parent, child friend or co-worker. The campaign shows that with the right tools, including early treatment, people with chronic diseases like MS may be able to have physically and emotionally fulfilling lives, despite the condition. *Mastering MS* offers resources people with chronic diseases like MS might need to manage their condition, as well as to better cope with changes that may occur in their personal and professional relationships.

For more information about multiple sclerosis and the *Mastering MS* program, visit:

www.multiplesclerosis.com/masteringms.com

Every Moment Counts

Being diagnosed with MS can be frightening. You may be confused about what the disease really is, or concerned about how it will affect your life and your family, and whether you'll be able to keep working or enjoying your normal activities.

You may gain control of your MS. By starting an effective disease-modifying treatment early, you may reduce the number of relapses that can affect you later in life.

This brochure explains the benefit of early treatment, including some conversation starters to help you talk to your doctor to determine if early treatment is right for you.

Asking the right questions is important. So, if you've recently been diagnosed or are experiencing symptoms of MS, talk to your doctor right away.

What is Early Treatment?

If you have been diagnosed with MS on clinical grounds, that means you've already experienced two separate *"clinical events"* or attacks suggestive of the disease. Today, doctors can determine if you have a higher risk of developing MS even if you have had only one clinical attack with the presence of MRI features suggestive of MS.

The earlier you visit a doctor, the better.

This means if you have MS, you may do more to slow disease progression by beginning treatment with a disease modifying therapy at diagnosis, rather than waiting until your symptoms get worse. Clinical research also has found that starting certain disease modifying therapies even earlier – after the first attack suggestive of MS and having MRI features consistent with MS – may provide greater benefits.



"Early treatment means that the patient has had one episode that is suggestive of MS and consistent findings on MRI. From an academic point of view, they don't yet have MS, but you may be pretty sure that they will develop MS based on the results of the MRI and other tests. That is the point at which we should consider starting treatment."

- Dr. Xavier Montalban, *Professor for Clinical Neuroimmunology, University of Basel, Basel, Switzerland*

Why Early Treatment?

"It is important for patients to be diagnosed and offered effective treatment options early. It is known that irreversible neurological damage may occur before a definite clinical diagnosis of MS is established." – **PD Dr. Karl Baum**, chief of staff, Neurological Clinic at Hennigsdorf Hospital, Hennigsdorf, Germany

Right now, you may be thinking, *"I don't have any symptoms of MS. I feel just fine – why do I need to be on treatment?"*

It's natural to be hesitant about starting treatment. But it's important to remember that while you may look and feel fine on the surface, underneath the disease may be causing damage to nerves in the brain and spinal cord. Some of this nerve damage cannot be reversed.

In fact, a study suggests that MS may cause three times more nerve damage in the first year of the disease than later on. That damage may eventually affect the way you walk, see, and even the way your brain processes information.

Getting effective treatment early may delay this damage.

"I think early treatment is vital. I can still enjoy a very full life – I play tennis, I ski, I even played rugby last year. When I was first diagnosed, they told me I would not play again. The truth is, I have full mobility and lead an active life which I believe is due to early treatment."

– **Philip** (Individual experiences may vary)



Getting Help Right Away

As a pediatric nurse, Louise was familiar with many diseases, but not with MS. So when she suffered her first MS attack, she wasn't quite sure what she was experiencing. *"When my first symptoms of MS appeared, I was frightened."* When Louise got to work, she noticed that she couldn't write very well.

After being referred to a neurologist, she was diagnosed with MS and prescribed medication to manage the first attack. Knowing the importance of early treatment, Louise's neurologist and MS nurses helped get her on medication as early as possible. Once she started, *"the Louise that I was before the diagnosis was back. I felt like I could enjoy nights out with my friends and go away with them."* (Individual experiences may vary.)

Take Back Control

Wendy first realized something was not right when she felt tingling sensations in her legs and then later in her arms. Sometimes, she lost control of her legs and walked as if she were drunk. Her whole world turned upside down the day she learned she had MS. *"I was angry. Why did this happen to me? I felt insecure about my future."*

Having MS means you may need to face many changes and some new challenges in life. There are some things that you will not be able to change or control.

But by starting treatment early – and staying on it – you may take control of the disease.

Fortunately for Wendy, her neurologist knew the importance of early treatment and started her immediately on a disease-modifying therapy. *"The treatment has become part of my daily life. I know why it's important and I am committed to staying on therapy."*



Early Treatment Prevents Disease Progression

By slowing the progression of the disease, you may have fewer exacerbations.

Before Kim started treatment, she experienced symptoms two to three times a year. She had to stop running and jet skiing because the symptoms were unbearable. *“It was not unusual for me to be hospitalized for two to three weeks each year.”*

After starting interferon beta treatment every other day, Kim’s relapses decreased, and she has not been hospitalized since. *“Therapies that prevent symptoms from recurring and delay disease progression are important for people with MS like me. I believe my future is brighter because of the treatments available to me.”* (Individual experiences may vary.)

In early treatment studies, people treated early with disease-modifying drugs had a lower risk of disease progression later on. In one particular study, people treated early were less likely to develop clinically definite MS compared to people treated later.

Talking To Your Doctor

Finding answers about your MS treatment is easier when you ask the right questions.

This section provides you with important tips for talking to your doctor, including questions to help you start the conversation about early treatment.



Questions To Ask Your Doctor

- How will I know if the medications are working?
- What side effects and precautions should I be aware of, and how should I respond to them?
- How can my family help make sure I am following my treatment plan in the approved manner?
- Is there anything else I can do to cope with flare-ups such as trouble with mobility, vision, etc.?
- How can my family help me to cope with these flare-ups?
- What do you recommend for treating the symptoms of my MS (like muscle spasms or pain)?
- Is there anyone besides a doctor I can talk to if I have questions about my condition or treatment?
- Are there any local support groups, for myself and/or my family?



Involving Your Family Early

Involving your family in your care early is important. It helps them feel like they are part of the process from the beginning.

- **Listen to your family:** Sometimes those closest to you, such as your partner or best friend, may notice changes in your symptoms before you do. Keeping track of your health may also mean listening to their observations.
- **Bring a family member with you to the doctor.** Let them learn more about your condition firsthand. Being at the doctor's office also allows them the opportunity to ask questions and get involved in your treatment.

Don't go through this difficult time alone. Your loved ones will have a better idea of how to support you if they are involved.

– *Denise Knowles, Relationship Expert*

Contributors



Michele Wahlder, a certified life and career coach for more than 15 years, counsels clients on how to deal with life, health, and career issues. As a two-time cancer survivor, she has had first hand experience in dealing with the challenges of a chronic illness and how it affects a person's career.



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All the people with MS mentioned in the Mastering MS brochures have been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS) and are currently receiving treatment for their disease.

The testimonials represent each person's own experience, both with the disease and any treatment history. Statements regarding MS treatment represent the individual's own experience and perspective. Not all people receiving treatment will have the same results.

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