

# Relapsing-remitting multiple sclerosis



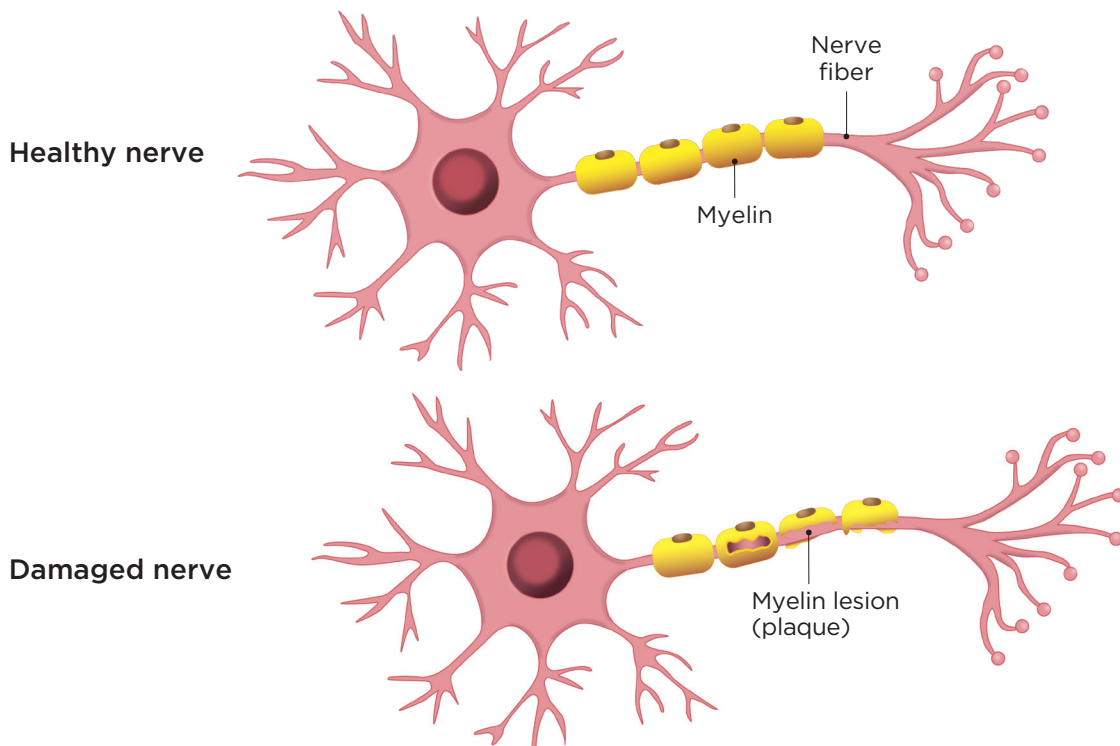
Your doctor has told you that you have this form of the disease. Here's what you need to know about it.

## What is multiple sclerosis?

It's a disease that is called "autoimmune". Cells that should be defending your body (white blood cells) attack:

- the nerves in your brain
- the nerves in your spine
- the nerves that connect your eyes to your brain (optic nerves)

This creates inflammation, which damages the myelin, a layer that covers the nerves to protect them and help them transmit nerve signals. This damage creates what are called "lesions" or "plaques" on the nerves. Because of these lesions, nerve signals don't get through as well.



## Why do I have this disease?

Multiple sclerosis affects 1 person out of 500 in Québec.

The exact cause is still unknown.

It's not a genetic disease. The risk that a parent with the disease would pass it on to their child is very low.

However, certain genes and certain factors (such as vitamin D deficiency, smoking, etc.) can increase the risk.

## What are the symptoms?

They vary from one person to another. You could have one or more of the following symptoms:

- loss of sensation to touch
- vision problems
- balance problems
- difficulty moving
- weakness
- numbness
- fatigue
- sudden tension of the muscles (spasms)
- difficulty holding back the urge to urinate
- sexual function problems (such as erectile dysfunction, decreased libido, etc.)



## Why is it called relapsing-remitting?

Multiple sclerosis has several forms.

It's relapsing-remitting when symptoms develop quickly and intensely, and then get better. These are called relapses.

The symptoms are felt for a period ranging from a few days to a few weeks. They gradually disappear over the following weeks and months. It can take up to a year to recover after a relapse. In some cases, it can leave chronic symptoms (sequelae).

These relapses, and how long they might last, can't be predicted.

It's possible to experience the same symptoms as those of a relapse even when there are no new lesions. Discuss this with your health care team.

Sometimes the relapsing-remitting form of the disease becomes "progressive". In this case, the symptoms no longer come in relapses, but can gradually worsen over time.

## What exams will I have?

To monitor the evolution of your disease, you'll have exams:

- > **In clinic.** Your neurologist will assess your vision, movements, strength, sensitivity, and balance.
- > **In radiology.** You'll have a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan. This is done to see if there are any new lesions in the nerves of your brain or spinal cord. It's also done to see how the lesions already there are evolving.



The frequency of these exams varies from one person to another.

## How can relapses be treated?

Medication isn't always necessary. Often, it's enough to just let the symptoms go away on their own.

When relapses are too strong, medications called corticosteroids can be prescribed.

They ease the symptoms but have no effect on the after-effects of the relapse.

## How can the disease be treated?

There is no cure for multiple sclerosis.

However, medications help to prevent relapses and new lesions. They also help you maintain your capacities and lead an active life longer. They can be taken by mouth or injected under the skin or through the veins.

They change your defense system (immune system) to reduce the attack on your nerves. This decreases damage to myelin and reduces the frequency and intensity of relapses.

Most people with multiple sclerosis who have severe physical disabilities or cognitive problems were diagnosed with the disease before these treatments were discovered.

Your treatment will be chosen with your neurologist. The choice will be made based on your preferences, symptoms, age, and other health conditions.



## How can I take care of myself now?

Even if there is no cure for multiple sclerosis, following your treatment carefully will help to slow down the progression of the disease. Certain lifestyle habits will also help to slow it down.

It's recommended that you:

- > eat fruits, vegetables, and fiber-rich foods. This helps reduce inflammation.
- > stay physically active on a regular basis, but respect your limits. This reduces inflammation.



- > engage in social and intellectual activities. This helps keep the nervous system healthy.
- > find ways to manage your stress. See the health fact sheet [Relaxation for better stress management.](#)
- > stop smoking.

## Can I have a baby or breastfeed?

Multiple sclerosis has no effect on the possibility of having children in either men or women.

You can give birth vaginally and with epidural.

It's also possible to breastfeed.

However, you should talk to your health care team when you're planning a pregnancy.

Some treatments may need to be adjusted beforehand.

Others can't be taken while you're pregnant or breastfeeding.

## Can I drive a car?

Yes, you can.

However, you need to inform the Société de l'assurance automobile du Québec (SAAQ) that you have this disease. Be vigilant about symptoms that could have an effect on your driving (such as problems with vision or movement). If you have any such symptoms, talk with your family doctor and health care team.

## Are there any symptoms to look out for?

If a symptom is affecting your daily life, or if you're worried, tell your health care team.

## Who should I call to cancel or postpone an appointment?

Call the Appointment Centre at:

☎ **514 890-8123**

If the appointment is for an imaging exam, call the Radiology Department at **514 890-8450**.

## Who should I contact to renew a prescription?

Contact your pharmacist and ask them to send a fax to your neurologist at:

☎ **514 412-7139**



## Who should I contact for questions about my health?

If you have questions about the disease, symptoms, or treatments, contact the Multiple Sclerosis Clinic:

☎ **514 890-8212**

> [neuro.sep.chum@ssss.gouv.qc.ca](mailto:neuro.sep.chum@ssss.gouv.qc.ca)



### USEFUL RESOURCES

MS Canada: The MS Canada website has information on all aspects of the disease:

> [mscanada.ca](http://mscanada.ca)

There is also a guide that explains how to talk to loved ones about the disease: on the home page, click on the magnifying glass icon, type in "Library", and then select "MS Resources". Under the header "Multiple sclerosis and family", select "Talking about MS: A Guide for Families".

Other health sheets published by the CHUM are available. Ask for those that might fit your situation.



You can also find them on our website

[chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante](http://chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante)



### Questions


*The content of this document in no way replaces the recommendations and diagnoses made, or the treatment suggested by your health professional.*

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