



# MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

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## Multiple Sclerosis

### Key facts

- Multiple sclerosis (MS) affects function in cognitive, emotional, motor, sensory, or visual areas and occurs as a result of a person's immune system attacking their brain and spinal cord.
- It is estimated that over 1.8 million people have MS worldwide.
- People of all ages can be affected, but it is more common in young adults and in females.
- MS can improve or stabilize by being treated with medicines early in the course of the disease and treatments will be different for each person depending on the severity of the disease and symptoms.

### Overview

Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a condition that happens when the immune system attacks the brain and spinal cord.

Symptoms of MS vary from person to person and depend on the location and severity of nerve fibre damage. These often include vision problems, tiredness, trouble walking and keeping balance, and numbness or weakness in the arms and legs. Symptoms can come and go or last for a long time.

The causes of MS are not known but a family history of the disease may increase the risk.

While there is no cure for MS, treatment can

reduce symptoms, prevent further relapses, and improve quality of life.

### MS can present in a variety of ways including:

- clinically isolated syndrome (CIS): describes an episode of neurologic symptoms that are the first clinical sign of possible MS;
- relapsing remitting (RRMS): the most common form of MS characterized by intermittent attacks of symptoms (relapses), followed by a short or long period of no clinical attacks (remissions);
- secondary progressive (SPMS): after living with RRMS for a long period of time, relapses decrease, and symptoms continue progressively without relapses or remissions; and
- primary progressive (PPMS): starting from the initial symptoms, the disease gradually progresses and gets worse without any clear relapses or remissions.

MS is not always easy to diagnose in its early stages. Typically, people who have been diagnosed with MS will have been through several diagnostic stages, which can be an unsettling and frightening experience.

### Symptoms

Symptoms of multiple sclerosis can be different from person to person. They can come and go or get worse over time. MS can affect any part of the central nervous system.



# Multiple Sclerosis

MS symptoms can worsen with heat or during other infections such as urinary tract or respiratory infections.

## Symptoms can include:

- vision problems
- difficulty walking or keeping balance
- difficulty thinking clearly
- numbness or weakness especially in the arms and legs
- muscle stiffness
- depression
- problems with sexual function or urination
- feeling very tired.

## Causes

MS is an inflammatory demyelinating condition that results from an autoimmune attack on myelin, the fatty insulation that surrounds the nerves in the brain and spinal cord. This disrupts the electrical impulses that are sent through the nerves to the rest of the body and results in scars (plaques or sclerosis).

It is not known what triggers the immune system to attack myelin, but genetic and environmental factors are thought to play a role. MS happens most commonly in young to middle-aged adults, more in females than males, and is more common in higher latitudes, possibly due to sun exposure and vitamin D.

## Diagnosis

MS is a diagnosis of exclusion and there are no definitive diagnostic tests. Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) can help with diagnosis by showing plaques or sclerosis on the brain and spinal cord. Other tests such as lumbar puncture, optical coherence tomography (OCT) and visual evoked potentials can also help support the diagnosis.

## Treatment and care

Treatments for MS will be different for each person. They depend on the stage of the disease and symptoms.

The goals of MS treatment are to reduce the frequency and severity of relapses, slow disease progression, manage symptoms, and improve quality of life.

Specific MS disease modifying therapies (DMTs) are started as early as possible to slow disease progression and prevent relapses.

Steroids are sometimes used in the short term to treat relapses. Other medicines can be used to reduce the symptoms of MS such as fatigue, muscle tightening, depression and urinary or sexual problems. These medicines do not change the course of the disease but help manage the symptoms.

Rehabilitation specialists can help improve functioning, quality of life and reduce muscle stiffness and spasms.

Many people feel fatigue with multiple sclerosis. Ways to manage fatigue include:

- regular exercise
- healthy sleep patterns
- avoiding medicines that make fatigue worse.

In the past twenty years treatment options for MS have improved dramatically. In high income countries many oral, intravenous, and injectable options exist to treat MS. However, most of these



medications are not available in low- and middle-income countries and there is still a lack of treatment options for progressive types of MS.

People with MS and their families should be encouraged to seek services and guidance from local and national Organizations of Disabled People (ODPs) and other disability focused organizations, which can provide vital advice about legal rights, economic opportunities, and social engagement to ensure that people disabled by MS or other neurological disorders are able to live full and rewarding lives.

## WHO Response

In May 2022, the World Health Assembly endorsed the Intersectoral global action plan on epilepsy and other neurological disorders 2022–2031. The action plan addresses the challenges and gaps in providing care and services for people with epilepsy and other neurological disorders such as MS that exist worldwide and ensure a comprehensive, coordinated response across sectors. This includes raising policy prioritization and strengthening governance, providing effective, timely and responsive diagnosis, treatment, and care, implementing strategies for promotion and prevention, fostering research and innovation and strengthening information systems.

## WHO also supports countries to manage MS by:

- working to include MS medications in WHO Essential Medicines Lists (EML);
- collaboration with civil society such as Multiple Sclerosis International Federation (MSIF) on broad issues and advocacy including through World MS Day (May 30);
- creation of the Atlas of Multiple Sclerosis for use by people with MS, health professionals and MS groups and organizations to stimulate and inform campaigns for improvements in the services and support provided to people with MS and those with an interest in their well-being and quality of life; and
- supporting countries to implement guidelines and strengthen health systems to improve the rehabilitation services for people with neurological disorders.

**Source: Multiple sclerosis (who.int) 6 Feb 2024**

# Tips to Prevent Vision Loss

## Have a comprehensive eye exam

You might think your vision is fine or that your eyes are healthy, but visiting your eye care professional for a comprehensive dilated eye exam is the only way to really be sure. When it comes to common vision problems, some people don't realize they could see better with glasses or contact lenses. In addition, many common eye diseases, such as glaucoma, diabetic eye disease, and age-related macular degeneration, often have no warning signs. A dilated eye exam is the only way to detect these diseases in their early stages.

During a comprehensive dilated eye exam, your eye care professional places drops in your eyes to dilate, or widen, the pupil to allow more light to enter the eye—the same way an open door lets more light into a dark room. This process enables your eye care professional to get a good look at the back of the eyes and examine them for any signs of damage or disease. Your eye care professional is the only one who can determine if your eyes are healthy and if you're seeing your best.

## Maintain your blood sugar levels

90% of blindness caused by diabetes is preventable. Ask your health care team to help you set and reach goals to manage your blood sugar, blood pressure, and cholesterol—also known as the ABCs of diabetes.

- The goal set for many people is less than 7% for this blood test, but your doctor might set different goals for you.
- Blood pressure: High blood pressure causes heart disease. The goal is less than 140/90 mmHg for most people, but your doctor might set different goals for you.
- Cholesterol: LDL or “bad” cholesterol builds up and clogs your blood vessels. HDL or “good” cholesterol helps remove the “bad” cholesterol from your blood vessels. Ask what your cholesterol numbers should be.

## Know your family's eye health history

Talk to your family members about their eye health history. It's important to know if anyone has been diagnosed with an eye disease or condition, since many are hereditary. This information will help to determine if you're at higher risk for developing an eye disease or condition.

Being overweight or obese increases your risk of developing diabetes and other systemic conditions, which can lead to vision loss, such as diabetic eye disease or glaucoma. If you're having trouble maintaining a healthy weight, talk to your doctor.

## Wear protective eyewear

Wear protective eyewear when playing sports or doing activities around the home. Protective eyewear includes safety glasses and goggles, safety shields, and eye guards specially designed to provide the correct protection for the activity in which you're engaged. Most protective eyewear lenses are made of polycarbonate, which is 10 times stronger than other plastics. Many eye care providers sell protective eyewear, as do some sporting goods stores.

## Quit smoking or never start

Smoking is as bad for your eyes as it is for the rest of your body. Research has linked smoking to an increased risk of developing age-related macular degeneration, cataract, and optic nerve damage, all of which can lead to blindness.

## Be cool and wear your shades

Sunglasses are a great fashion accessory, but their most important job is to protect your eyes from the sun's ultraviolet rays. When purchasing sunglasses, look for ones that block out 99 to 100 percent of both UV-A and UV-B radiation.

## Give your eyes a rest

If you spend a lot of time at the computer or focusing on any one thing, you sometimes forget to blink, and your eyes can get fatigued. Try the 20-20-20 rule: Every 20 minutes, look away about 20 feet in front of you for 20 seconds. This short exercise can help reduce eyestrain.

## Clean your hands and your contact lenses—properly

To avoid the risk of infection, always wash your hands thoroughly before putting in or taking out your contact lenses. Make sure to disinfect contact lenses as instructed and replace them as appropriate. Learn more about keeping your eyes healthy while wearing contact lenses and listen to a podcast on keeping your eyes safe.

## Practice workplace eye safety

Employers are required to provide a safe work environment. When protective eyewear is required as a part of your job, make a habit of wearing the appropriate type at all times, and encourage your co-workers to do the same.

## Eat right to protect your sight

You've heard that carrots are good for your eyes. But eating a diet rich in fruits and vegetables—particularly dark leafy greens, such as spinach, kale, or collard greens—is important for keeping your eyes healthy, too. Research has also shown there are eye health benefits from eating fish high in omega-3 fatty acids, such as salmon, tuna, and halibut.

Source: Tips to prevent vision loss | CDC  
Accessed 7 Feb 2024





# Facts about Developmental Disabilities

Developmental disabilities are a group of conditions due to an impairment in physical, learning, language, or behaviour areas. These conditions begin during the developmental period, may impact day-to-day functioning, and usually last throughout a person's lifetime.

## Developmental Milestones

Developmental monitoring is an active, ongoing process of watching a child grow and encouraging conversations between parents and providers about a child's skills and abilities. Developmental monitoring involves observing how your child grows and whether your child meets the typical developmental milestones, or skills that most children reach by a certain age, in playing, learning, speaking, behaving, and moving.

Parents, grandparents, early childhood education providers, and other caregivers can participate in developmental monitoring. CDC's Learn the Signs. Act Early. program has developed free materials, including CDC's Milestone Tracker app, to help parents and providers work together to monitor your child's development and know when there might be a concern and if more screening is needed. You can use a brief checklist of milestones to see how your child is developing. If you notice that your child is not meeting milestones, talk with your doctor or nurse about your concerns and ask about developmental screening. Learn more about CDC Milestone Tracker app, milestone checklists, and other parent materials.

When you take your child to a well visit, your doctor or nurse will also do developmental monitoring. The doctor or nurse might ask you questions about your child's development or will talk and play with your child to see if they are developing and meeting milestones.

Your doctor or nurse may also ask about your child's family history. Be sure to let your doctor or nurse know about any conditions that your child's family members have, including ASD, learning disorders, intellectual disability, or attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

## Developmental Monitoring and Screening

Developmental screening takes a closer look at how your child is developing.

Developmental screening is more formal than developmental monitoring. It is a regular part of some well-child visits even if there is not a known concern.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends developmental and behavioural screening for all children during regular well-child visits at these ages:



- 9 months
- 18 months
- 30 months

In addition, AAP recommends that all children be screened specifically for ASD during regular well-child visits at these ages:

- 18 months
- 24 months

Screening questionnaires and checklists are based on research that compares your child to other children of the same age. Questions may ask about language, movement, and thinking skills, as well as behaviours and emotions. Developmental screening can be done by a doctor or nurse, or other professionals in healthcare, community, or school settings. Your doctor may ask you to complete a questionnaire as part of the screening process. Screening at times other than the recommended ages should be done if you or your doctor have a concern. Additional screening should also be done if a child is at high risk for ASD (for example, having a sibling or other family member with ASD) or if behaviours sometimes associated with ASD are present. If your child's healthcare provider does not periodically check your child with a developmental screening test, you can ask that it be done.

**Source: Facts About Developmental Disabilities | CDC  
Accessed 7 Feb 2024**

# Causes of Obesity

Obesity is a complex disease that occurs when an individual's weight is higher than what is considered healthy for his or her height. Obesity affects children as well as adults. Many factors can contribute to excess weight gain including eating patterns, physical activity levels, and sleep routines. Social determinants of health, genetics, and taking certain medications also play a role.

## Food, Activity, and Sleep

Eating and physical activity patterns, insufficient sleep, and several other factors influence excess weight gain.

## Social Determinants of Health (SDOH)

The conditions in which we live, learn, work, and play are called social determinants of health (SDOH). It can be difficult to make healthy food choices and get enough physical activity if these conditions do not support health. Differences in SDOH affect chronic disease outcomes and risks, including obesity, among racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups as well as in different geographies and among people with different physical abilities.

Places such as childcare centres, schools, or communities affect eating patterns and activity through the foods and drinks they offer and the physical activity opportunities they provide. Other community factors that influence obesity include the affordability of healthy food options, peer and social supports, marketing and promotion, and policies that determine community design.

## Genetics

Genetic changes in human populations occur too slowly to be responsible for the obesity epidemic. Yet variants in several genes may contribute to obesity by increasing hunger and food intake. Rarely, a specific variant of a single gene (monogenic obesity) causes a clear pattern of inherited obesity within a family.

## Illnesses and Medications

Some illnesses, such as Cushing's disease, may lead to obesity or weight gain. Drugs such as steroids and some antidepressants may also cause weight gain. Research continues on the role of other factors such as chemical exposures and the role of the microbiome.

## What Can Be Done?

### Eating Patterns

- Healthy eating follows the 2020-2025, It emphasizes a variety of vegetables and fruits, whole grains, a variety of lean



protein foods, and low-fat and fat-free dairy products. It also limits foods and beverages with added sugars, solid fats, or sodium. See Healthy Eating for Healthy Weight.

- Managers of worksites and public facilities can improve the nutritional quality of food and beverages available in those settings. See Food Service Guidelines Implementation Toolkit.

### Physical Activity

- The Physical Activity Guidelines for recommends that children aged 3 through 5 years should be physically active throughout the day. Children aged 6 – 17 years need at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day. Adults need 150 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity a week. See Physical Activity for Different Groups.
- Communities can create or modify environments to make it easier for people to walk or bike to everyday destinations. See Community Strategies.

### Sleep

- Newborns need 14 to 17 hours of sleep per day. That amount decreases with age; teenagers need 8 to 10 hours of sleep per day, and adults need 7 or more hours of sleep per day. See How Much Sleep Do I Need?

### Social Determinants of Health

- State early care and education systems can promote standards that address nutrition, infant feeding, physical activity, and screen time. See Early Care and Education.
- Communities, programs, initiatives, and public health practitioners can work to together to remove barriers to health and achieve health See Health Equity Resources.

**Source: Causes of Obesity | Overweight & Obesity | CDC  
Accessed 7 Feb 2024**

# TB Awareness

An estimated 54 200 people in South Africa died of tuberculosis (TB) in 2022 and around 280 000 fell ill with the disease, according to new World Health Organization (WHO) figures. The numbers indicate that South Africa is meeting its targets relating to the reduction of TB cases, but not when it comes to reducing deaths due to TB.

The new data is from the WHO's 2023 Global TB Report published earlier this week. In addition to the main report, the WHO also published several country profiles – South Africa's is here.

**Source: In-depth: What new WHO TB numbers mean for SA - Spotlight (spotlightnsp.co.za) accessed 7 Feb 2024**

## Overview

Tuberculosis (TB) is a serious illness that mainly affects the lungs. The germs that cause tuberculosis are a type of bacteria.

Tuberculosis can spread when a person with the illness coughs, sneezes or sings. This can put tiny droplets with the germs into the air. Another person can then breathe in the droplets, and the germs enter the lungs.

Tuberculosis spreads easily where people gather in crowds or where people live in crowded conditions. People with HIV/AIDS and other people with weakened immune systems have a higher risk of catching tuberculosis than people with typical immune systems.

Drugs called antibiotics can treat tuberculosis. But some forms of the bacteria no longer respond well to treatments.

## Symptoms

When tuberculosis (TB) germs survive and multiply in the lungs, it is called a TB infection. A TB infection may be in one of three stages. Symptoms are different in each stage.

Primary TB infection. The first stage is called the primary infection. Immune system cells find and capture the germs. The immune system may completely destroy the germs. But some captured germs may still survive and multiply.

Most people don't have symptoms during a primary infection. Some people may get flu-like symptoms, such as:

- Low fever
- Tiredness
- Cough

Latent TB infection. Primary infection is usually followed by the stage called latent TB infection. Immune system cells build a wall around lung tissue with TB germs. The germs can't do any more harm if the immune system keeps them under control. But the germs survive. There are no symptoms during latent TB infection.

Active TB disease. Active TB disease happens when the immune system can't control an infection. Germs cause disease throughout the lungs or other parts of the body. Active TB disease may happen right after primary infection. But it usually happens after months or years of latent TB infection.

Symptoms of active TB disease in the lungs usually begin gradually and worsen over a few weeks. They may include:

- Cough
- Coughing up blood or mucus
- Chest pain
- Pain with breathing or coughing
- Fever
- Chills
- Night sweats
- Weight loss
- Not wanting to eat
- Tiredness
- Not feeling well in general

Active TB disease outside the lungs. TB infection can spread from the lungs to other parts of the body. This is called extrapulmonary tuberculosis. Symptoms vary depending on what part of the body is infected. Common symptoms may include:

- Fever
- Chills
- Night sweats
- Weight loss
- Not wanting to eat
- Tiredness
- Not feeling well in general
- Pain near the site of infection

Active TB disease in the voice box is outside the lungs, but it has symptoms more like disease in the lungs.

Common sites of active TB disease outside the lungs include:

- Kidneys
- Liver

- Fluid surrounding the brain and spinal cord
- Heart muscles
- Genitals
- Lymph nodes
- Bones and joints
- Skin
- Walls of blood vessels
- Voice box, also called larynx

Active TB disease in children. Symptoms of active TB disease in children vary. Typically, symptoms by age may include the following:

- Teenagers. Symptoms are similar to adult symptoms.
- 1- to 12-year-olds. Younger children may have a fever that won't go away and weight loss.
- Infants. The baby doesn't grow or gain weight as expected. Also, a baby may have symptoms from swelling in the fluid around the brain or spinal cord, including:
  - o Being sluggish or not active
  - o Unusually fussy
  - o Vomiting
  - o Poor feeding
  - o Bulging soft spot on the head
  - o Poor reflexes

## When to see a doctor

The symptoms of tuberculosis are similar to symptoms of many different illnesses. See your health care provider if you have symptoms that don't improve with a few days of rest.

**Get emergency care if you have:**

- Chest pain
- Sudden, severe headache
- Confusion
- Seizures
- Difficulty breathing

**Get immediate or urgent care if you:**

- Cough up blood
- Have blood in your urine or stool

**Source: Tuberculosis - Symptoms & causes - Mayo Clinic Accessed 7 Feb 2024**



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