

Basic steps to managing your health

To live well with MS as you get older, you'll need to stay on top of your overall health and wellbeing.

In this booklet, we look at four simple steps you can take to manage your health:

Be alert to and report new symptoms to your doctor

Have screening tests for other health conditions

Diligently follow health advice

Keep physically active



Living well with MS as you grow older

www.msif.org/resource/living-well-with-ms-as-you-grow-older/

Spotting new symptoms

New symptoms could be related to MS or your age. They could also be a sign of a new health problem.

If you have any new symptoms, share them with your doctor. By finding the exact cause, health professionals can give you the right treatment and advice. For example, fatigue caused by a sleep disorder or by thyroid disease might be treated differently to fatigue caused by MS.

Sometimes, multiple things may contribute to your symptoms. You might need to see a few different healthcare professionals before they can work out the causes and determine the best treatments for you.

Your primary care doctor (family physician) is best placed to help with health changes due to age, while your neurologist can help you to manage your MS. They may refer you to other specialists to help you to manage other conditions.

You can find more information on MS symptoms and their management on the MSIF website:

<https://www.msif.org/about-ms/symptoms-of-ms/>

Having screening tests for other conditions

As well as looking after your current health, consider having any screening tests you're offered.

Screening tests check for risks or warning signs of other conditions. Spotting these early means you can take steps to reduce your risk or manage a condition at an earlier stage.

Depending on your country, age and sex, screening available to you might include checks for bowel cancer, diabetes, an enlarged blood vessel in your abdomen (aneurysm), depression, cervical cancer, breast cancer and weak bones (osteoporosis).

'We will all get old, but it may be more of a challenge for those of us living with MS. Don't be too hard on yourself and accept your limitations. Seek out support to help with activities that you can no longer do, or modify the activity. Every day, my husband and I walk and roll around the block with our dog, we have done so for the past two years.'

MARIE FROM CANADA, DIAGNOSED IN 1996

Following health advice

Doctors, nurses and other health professionals can provide regular checks, advice, treatments and support. However, only you are in the position to protect your health and wellbeing every day. So, save some time and energy each day to devote to your health.

It can be hard to stay focussed and follow health advice every day. However, some age-related changes and other health conditions may add to your health problems. Unhealthy habits such as smoking can also worsen MS.

It will pay off if you can find routines and approaches that help you to stay on track.

We give some general tips at the end of this section. In the next section, we look further at approaches you can take to manage your MS, health and wellbeing within your overall life (self-management).



Keeping physically active

For older people with MS, being more physically active can improve walking and physical function. Being regularly active may have additional benefits including:

- better cognitive function
- reduced MS symptoms
- slower disease progression
- help with depression
- improved cardiovascular fitness.

Whatever your age and fitness level, there are ways to keep active. You'll need to find the right type of activity and intensity for you. **Check with your doctor before starting a new physical activity plan.**

You may need to be at least moderately active to get the benefits listed above. Examples of moderate activity are faster walking, gardening, swimming and cycling.

Lighter physical activity — including strengthening exercises, posture work and stretches — are possible seated.

'Living with MS for over 20 years has definitely been a challenge, but it is always manageable. The mantra I tell myself to keep me going when I face challenges is: If I rest, I rust.'

GOPI FROM INDIA, DIAGNOSED IN 2002

Succeeding in being regularly physically active is about mindset as well as strength and stamina. You're more likely to keep physically active if you set yourself goals and have confidence in your ability to achieve them.

Ways to ensure success include:

- find activities you enjoy
- make plans with others to exercise together
- use an app to track your activity
- join local physical activity groups
- speak to your doctor or nurse about services to help you.



TIPS

looking after your health & wellbeing

- **Note down changes** to your physical and mental health in a diary or app so you can discuss them with your doctor or nurse.
- Be open to **hearing from friends, family and carers** if they notice a gradual change in your health that you might have overlooked.
- Have a **set routine** for taking medications. A pill box, calendar or reminders on your smartphone may help.
- If you're struggling to stay motivated or to fit your health needs into your daily life, ask your doctor or nurse what programmes or **specialist support** is available to you.
- Take up invitations for **health screening**. If you're unsure what's available, contact your family doctor's clinic or insurer to ask.



Additional resources

Online information and tools

General information resources on MS symptoms (various languages)

<https://www.msif.org/resource-topic/ms-symptoms/>

Fatigue – an invisible symptom of MS (booklet)

<https://www.msif.org/resource/fatigue-an-invisible-symptom-of-ms/>

Managing spasticity (booklet)

<https://www.msif.org/resource/managing-spasticity-in-ms/>

Managing MS and other health conditions (Webinar)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gTMIDJMMqpQ>

Managing MS and other health conditions (booklet)

<https://www.msif.org/resource/lifestyle-tips-for-managing-ms-other-medical-conditions/>

European MS Platform: home exercise programme (Video series)

<https://www.msif.org/resource/keep-moving-with-ms/>

Living well with progressive MS (Webinar)

<https://www.msif.org/resource/ask-an-ms-expert-living-well-with-progressive-ms/>

Stretching & strengthening (Video)

<https://www.msif.org/resource/wellness-break-stretching-and-strengthening/>

Exercise as part of everyday life (Booklet)

<https://www.msif.org/resource/exercise-as-part-of-everyday-life/>

Wellness discussion for people with MS and their healthcare providers (booklet)

<https://www.msif.org/resource/wellness-discussion-for-people-with-ms-and-their-healthcare-providers/>

This is a section from the guide 'Living well with MS as you grow older'. Download the full guide here:

www.msif.org/resource/living-well-with-ms-as-you-grow-older/



www.msif.org
www.facebook.com/msinternationalfederation
www.twitter.com/msintfederation