

ON THE ROAD TO WELLNESS

North Dakota Disability Health Project

Promoting the health
and wellness of people
with disabilities

November 2009 Issue 12

But You Look So Well: Basic Information About Multiple Sclerosis

This month, the ND Disability Health Project in collaboration with the National Multiple Sclerosis Society is bringing you information about MS and the support available to you through the North Central States Chapter located in Fargo, North Dakota.

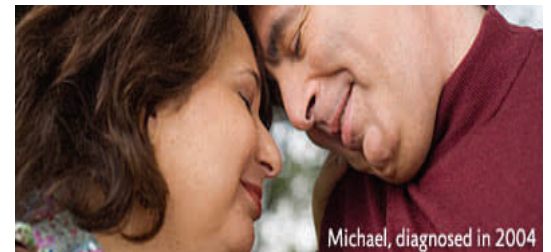


What is multiple sclerosis (MS)? According to the National Multiple Sclerosis Society (NMSS), MS is a chronic, often disabling disease of the central nervous system. Symptoms may range from tingling and numbness to paralysis and blindness. MS is not fatal; individuals with the condition can expect to have normal or near-normal life expectancies.

What Causes MS? Scientists have learned a great deal about MS in recent years; still, its cause remains elusive. Many investigators believe MS to be an *autoimmune disease*--one in which the body, through its immune system, launches a defensive attack against its own tissues. In the case of MS, it is the nerve-insulating myelin that comes under assault. Such assaults may be linked to an unknown environmental trigger, perhaps a virus.

MS Facts:

- 400,000 people are affected in the US, with approximately 200 new cases identified each week.
- In general, women are affected at almost twice the rate of men; however, among patients who develop the symptoms of MS at a later age, the gender ratio is more balanced. MS symptoms rarely begins before age 15 or after age 60.
- MS is five times more prevalent in temperate climates--such as those found in the northern United States, Canada, and Europe--than in tropical regions.
- MS is a life-long chronic disease diagnosed primarily in young adults who have a virtually normal life expectancy. Consequently, the economic, social, and medical costs associated with the disease are significant. Estimates place the annual costs of MS in the United States in excess of \$2.5 billion.
- In the population at large, the chance of developing MS is less than a tenth of one percent. However, if one person in a family has MS, that person's first-degree relatives--parents, children, and siblings--have a one to three percent chance of getting the disease.
- Twenty percent of the MS population has a benign form of the disease in which symptoms show little or no progression after the initial attack; these patients remain fully functional. A few patients experience malignant MS, defined as a swift and relentless decline resulting in significant disability or even death shortly after disease onset. However, MS is very rarely fatal and most people with MS have a fairly normal life expectancy.



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- Women with MS are able to become pregnant and have a healthy, full-term pregnancy. There is no evidence that pregnancy and childbirth affect the overall course of the disease one way or the other. Unfortunately, between 20 and 40 percent of women with MS do have a relapse in the three months following delivery.
- Whites are more than twice as likely as other races to develop MS.

Possible Symptoms of Multiple Sclerosis: The initial symptom of MS is often blurred or double vision, red-green color distortion, or even blindness in one eye. Most MS patients experience muscle weakness in their extremities and difficulty with coordination and balance. These symptoms may be severe enough to impair walking or even standing. In the worst cases, MS can produce partial or complete paralysis. Most people with MS also exhibit paresthesia, transitory abnormal sensory feelings such as numbness, prickling, or "pins and needles" sensations. Some may also experience pain. Speech impediments, tremors, and dizziness are other frequent complaints. Occasionally, people with MS have hearing loss. Approximately half of all people with MS experience cognitive impairments such as difficulties with concentration, attention, memory, and poor judgment, but such symptoms are usually mild and are frequently overlooked. Depression is another common feature of MS.

What treatments are available for MS? There are medications available that may help lessen the frequency and severity of MS attacks and reduce the accumulation of lesions in the brain. There is a wide range of therapies available to treat symptoms of MS, such as painful muscle tightness or spasticity, other pain, fatigue, and weakness. A health care professional is the best resource for developing the most comprehensive approach to managing an individual's MS.

About the National MS Society and the North Central States Chapter: The North Central States Chapter of the National MS Society serves 8,000 individuals with multiple sclerosis in Iowa, North Dakota, and South Dakota. The Chapter is available to link individuals to professionals for medical and legal advice, assist with the financial burden by offering scholarships, family grant programs and other forms of financial assistance, educating with accurate and up to date information, and by offering support through local affiliations. To contact the North Central States Chapter in your area you can call 1-800-344-4867 or visit www.myMSSociety.org.

Sources:

- National MS Society, North Central States Chapter/www.myMSSociety.org

Other MS Resources:

- To learn more about Multiple Sclerosis, visit the National Multiple Sclerosis Society website at www.nationalmssociety.org/index.aspx or contact
- Fargo, North Dakota Office, contact Kim Schneider, Program Manager, North Central States Chapter in Fargo, North Dakota at kim.schneider@nmss.org or call (701) 235-2678;
- Sioux Falls, South Dakota Office call (605) 336-7017;
- Des Moines, Iowa Office call (515) 270-6337;
- Cedar Rapids, Iowa Office call (319) 447-1800.

The ND Disability Health Project can provide technical assistance to assist with health promotion, staff training and education, and disability awareness. Contact us at 800.233.1737 or visit our website at

www.ndcpd.org/health



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Vision:

All people in ND have access to information and services they need to maintain good health and wellness. There are no health disparities between people with and without disabilities that are based solely on the presence of a disability.

Pay It Forward.....

Pass it on to others who may find this information helpful.