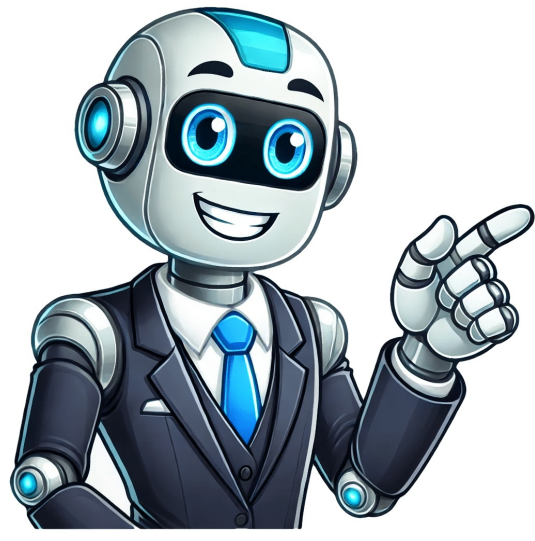


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In some ways, each person with multiple sclerosis lives with a different illness. Although nerve damage is always a part of the disease, the pattern is unique for everyone.Doctors have identified a few major types of MS. The categories are important, because they help predict how severe the disease can be and how well treatment will work.Most people with multiple sclerosis – around 85% – have this type. They usually have their first signs of the disease in their early 20s. After that, they have attacks of symptoms (called relapses) from time to time, followed by weeks, months, or years of recovery (called remissions).The nerves that are affected, how severe attacks are, the degree of recovery, and the time between relapses all vary widely from person to person.Eventually, most people with relapsing-relmitting MS will move on to a secondary progressive phase of MS. Learn more about the symptoms of relapsing-relmitting MS After living with relapsing-relmitting MS for many years, most people will get secondary progressive MS. In this type, symptoms begin a steady march without relapses or remissions. (In this way, it's like primary progressive MS.) The change typically happens between 10 and 20 years after you're diagnosed with relapsing-relmitting MS. It's unclear why the disease makes the shift. But scientists know a few things about the process:The older a person is when they are first diagnosed, the shorter the time they have before the disease becomes secondary progressive.People who don't fully recover from relapses generally move to secondary progressive MS sooner than those who do.The process of ongoing nerve damage changes. After the transformation, there's less inflammation and more of a slow decline in how well the nerves work.Secondary progressive MS is tough to treat, and the disease can be hard to handle day to day. Symptoms get worse at a different rate for each person. Treatments work moderately well, but most people will have some trouble using their body like they used to. Get more information on treatments for secondary progressive MS.In primary progressive multiple sclerosis, the disease gradually gets worse over time. There are no well-defined attacks of symptoms, and there is little or no remissions. In addition, MS treatments don't work as well with this type of MS. About 10% of people with MS have this type. A few things make it different from other types of MS:People with primary progressive MS are usually older when they're diagnosed – an average age of 40.Roughly equal numbers of men and women get it. In other types of the disease, women outnumber men 3 to 1.It usually leads to disability earlier than the most common type, relapsing-relmitting MS.You may have heard PPMS referred to as progressive relapsing multiple sclerosis (PRMS), but this terminology is no longer used. Find out more on how multiple sclerosis changes over time.No one knows. Tantalizing clues have sparked research in many areas, but there are no definite answers. Some theories include:Geography. People in colder parts of the world get MS more often than those in the warmer parts. Researchers are looking into how vitamin D and sunlight might protect against the disease.Smoking. Tobacco may raise the risk slightly. But it's not the whole story.Genetics. Genes do play a role. If an identical twin has MS, the other twin has a 20% to 40% chance of getting it. Siblings have a 3% to 5% chance if a brother or sister has it.Vaccines. Extensive research has essentially ruled out vaccines as a cause of MS Epstein-Barr virus exposure. Some research has shown that people who develop MS have antibodies to the EBV in their bodies. That means they have been exposed to the virus. It has also shown that the risk of developing MS is much higher in people who have been ill with EBV.Multiple sclerosis is probably an autoimmune disease. Like lupus or rheumatoid arthritis, the body creates antibodies against itself, causing damage. In MS, the damage occurs in the covering, or myelin, of nerves. Read more on the possible causes of multiple sclerosis. If you're living with multiple sclerosis (MS), you may have experienced a symptom known as the MS hug, also referred to as girdling or banding. This sensation is common among people with MS and is described as feeling like a tight band being squeezed around your chest or ribs. Sometimes, the MS hug can be confused with another common pain symptom, called costochondritis, which is inflammation of the cartilage between the ribs.People's experiences with MS can vary so much, and many types of pain can be described similarly. That's why explaining your symptoms to your doctor and figuring out the cause can feel frustrating and confusing. "Anybody else battle with costochondritis?" asked one MyMSTeam member. Another member responded, "I don't know what that is, or maybe I know it by a different name. What does it do?" If you're living with MS and have had an unexplained feeling of tightness or pain in your torso, this article may shed some light on potential causes and better equip you to talk to your doctor about your symptoms.What Is the MS Hug?Each person experiences the MS hug differently. The symptom can cause tightness anywhere between the neck and the waist. It may be felt on one or both sides of the body, and it can range from an annoying tickle to a vise-like grip that makes it difficult to breathe.What Causes the MS Hug?With MS, pain symptoms may be caused directly by MS damage to the nervous system, the result of damage to muscles or joints due to disability, or both. Nerve damage produces the nerve pain of the MS hug, and muscle spasms create the pressure, tightness, and aching.Heat, stress, and exertion are common triggers of MS symptoms, including the MS hug. In people with relapsing forms of MS, the hug can also be triggered by a flare or relapse. And in some cases, members report that they've had costochondritis triggering an MS hug.How Does the MS Hug Feel?MyMSTeam members have described the MS hug in various ways, ranging from mild discomfort to severe pain: "It feels like a boa constrictor tightening around me." "Mine are on the mellow side but very annoying!" "Feels like my bra is on too tight, then I realize I'm not wearing one!" What Is Costochondritis?Costochondritis develops when the cartilage between the ribs becomes inflamed. The term "costochondritis" comes from Latin and Greek roots: "costo-" meaning "rib," "chondr-" meaning "cartilage," and "-itis," indicating "inflammation."What Causes Costochondritis?In most cases, there's no clear cause for costochondritis. There are, however, a few risk factors to consider: An injury, like a hard blow to your chest Physical strain, including heavy coughing or overly strenuous exercise Illness or infection Researchers haven't determined exactly how common costochondritis is for people with MS.How Does Costochondritis Feel?MyMSTeam members have shared what costochondritis has felt like for them. "Guessing it is possible to have the hug and costochondritis," wrote one member. "Horribly painful." Another member said, "I was told by my neuro that costochondritis was part of my MS hug in that it involved part of the rib cage ... such terrible pain, I thought I was having a heart attack. The attack lasted about two weeks and hasn't ever returned."Other members have talked about how costochondritis symptoms can show up suddenly and without warning. "For two months now, I've had dull chest pain near my sternum that my GP diagnosed as costochondritis," a member wrote. "During this time, the pain comes and goes, no rhyme or reason. However, in the past two weeks, the pain can be anywhere on my chest, and I'll also feel it in the same location on my back. At times, my shoulders and neck have been tense. "When you're already living with symptoms of MS, the painful effects of costochondritis can feel overwhelming. Talk to your doctor if you start experiencing new symptoms that concern you.The Difference Between Costochondritis and MS HugIt can be hard to tell the difference between the MS hug and costochondritis because both can cause a painful squeezing feeling around the chest and make breathing difficult.A few key points to remember about costochondritis are: It often affects the left side of your breastbone, but it can also occur on the right side or both sides. It affects more than one of your ribs. It gets worse when you cough or take deep breaths. It's important to check in with your doctor to rule out other conditions if you're still unsure whether your pain is a symptom of MS.How To Manage SymptomsCostochondritis usually has to run its course before it goes away on its own. There are a few strategies doctors may recommend to help manage your symptoms. Treatment options for costochondritis typically include nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), rest, and physical therapy. In some cases, other medications may be considered based on individual needs.You can also try simple self-care strategies if your symptoms aren't severe. For example, using heat or ice or simply resting your body could help make you feel better. Mindfulness and cognitive behavioral therapy could also help you shift your focus and cope with the painful symptoms. Be sure to speak with a doctor before choosing a treatment plan.Keeping MS Flares Under ControlIf your rib pain seems to occur during MS relapses – periods of new or worsening neurological symptoms – it may be a sign that your MS isn't being fully controlled. More than 20 disease-modifying therapies (DMTs) have been approved to help lower the number of MS relapses and slow down disability. If you're still having flares even while following your treatment plan, talk to your neurologist about whether a different approach might help.Ask Your DoctorIf you're unsure about your symptoms or they've been going on for a while, it's a good idea to seek medical advice.Here are some ways to prepare before your appointment to help make the most of your time: Try to pinpoint when your symptoms started or worsened. Reflect on any major physical or emotional stressors that have happened recently in your life. Think about which daily activities are hardest because of the pain, such as work or hobbies. This isn't a complete list, but coming prepared to your appointment can help your doctor understand how costochondritis is affecting your life. It can also lead to more specific questions your doctor may ask and help guide the conversation about the best next steps for managing your symptoms.Read about when it's time to go to the emergency room with MS symptoms.Talk With Others Who UnderstandOn MyMSTeam, the social network for people with multiple sclerosis and their loved ones, members come together to ask questions, give advice, and share their stories with others who understand life with MS.Have you had costochondritis symptoms? Share your experience in the comments below, or start a conversation by posting on your Activities page. Since revealing her diagnosis in late 2018, Selma Blair has solidified herself as an inspirational and realistic representation of life with multiple sclerosis—a chronic disease that, as Selma bravely shares on Instagram, can cause an series of side effects from muscle spasms, to insomnia. Most recently, the illness called for a treatment so intense that it left Selma bald (and owning it!). But these recent symptoms are not necessarily the first signs of multiple sclerosis in women—or what sent Selma to the doc in the first place.At first, Selma thought she was just suffering from a pinched nerve—it wasn't until she fell in front of her doctor that she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. However, Blair, 47, thinks she's had the disease for much longer. "I have probably had this incurable disease for 15 years at least," she wrote on her original Instagram revelation in October. Unfortunately, since there's no one single test for multiple sclerosis, "the diagnosis can be missed, delayed or even incorrect," according to the National Multiple Sclerosis Society. But in the wise words of your third grade teacher: knowledge is power. Knowing the signs of multiple sclerosis in women can help make you that much more prepared to take action if you notice something seems off down the line. View full post on InstagramReal quick: What is multiple sclerosis again? Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a disease of the central nervous system, which affects the brain and spinal cord. MS basically blocks the messages that flow between the brain and the body, often resulting in vision problems, muscle weakness, coordination issues, numbness, and thinking or memory problems, according to the National Institutes of Health. Health Selma is just one 2.3 million people worldwide who suffer from MS, according to the National MS Society. There's no cure for the disease, though treatments and disease-modifying therapies can slow or delay the progression of symptoms.1 Was Diagnosed With Multiple Sclerosis At 25While 15 years seems like a long time to go undiagnosed, it's entirely possible—that's because MS symptoms can be hard to nail down. "A lot of the symptoms are kind of non-specific," says Jonathan Howard, M.D., a neurologist at NYU Langone's Multiple Sclerosis Comprehensive Care Center—that means many symptoms aren't only seen in MS patients. In fact, it's not uncommon for doctors to misdiagnose patients, ultimately delaying their treatment, says Amit Sachdev, M.D., an assistant professor and director of the Division of Neuromuscular Medicine at Michigan State University. If you're experiencing any of these concerning multiple sclerosis symptoms, check in with your doctor to figure out what's up. (But don't go into defcon-5 just yet; many other health issues could be to blame.) 1. Your foot keeps falling asleep. Normally, you only get that prickly pins-and-needles feeling when you've put pressure on your leg for too long, temporarily cutting off blood flow. But if you find that your arms, legs, hands, or feet feel numb, burning, or tingly out of nowhere, that can be a sign of MS, Segil says. 2. You're tired, like, all the time. You're inevitably going to come across those days when you just can't even. But sudden spells of severe exhaustion that last for weeks and mess with your ability to function normally on a day-to-day basis might be an indication that MS is destroying the nerves and fibers in your spinal column. 5 Signs Your Exhaustion Is More Serious"People with MS describe their fatigue as overwhelming, making even simple tasks difficult," says Costello. "It is often out of proportion with your activity, is not relieved by sleep, and is worsened if you become overheated." 3. You stop getting your period. Any illness that affects your immune system, including multiple sclerosis, may previously had a good eye for color, don't brush this off, Segil says. "It's called optic neuritis and it happens because of a loss of insulation around the optic nerves in the brain. It's one of the primary symptoms of multiple sclerosis," he explains. 5 Unexpected Things That Can Make You Go Blind But it's not just color-related: MS can also manifest as partial blindness, color blindness, blind spots, or blindness only in one eye. "Some people describe this as looking through a smudged contact lens, or looking through a screen or through water," says Costello. "It may also be associated with pain or a pulling sensation during eye movement." The onset of MS-related vision problems is usually slow, since the deterioration of the eyes happens over time. Optic neuritis can also happen on its own—without necessarily being associated with multiple sclerosis—as a result of an infection, a vitamin deficiency, or other autoimmune diseases.9. You're forgetting everything. If you've forgotten your bestie's birthday, lost your keys five times in one week, and rewashed the same clean laundry twice, you might worry you have early-onset Alzheimer's disease. The good news is that Alzheimer's is extremely rare in young women. The bad news is that problems with short-term memory or other cognitive issues can be MS symptoms in women.10. You're always drinking water, but you rarely have to pee. Being able to hydrate all day without visiting the ladies room may seem like an awesome talent, but it's not a good thing. It's a hallmark of multiple sclerosis, especially if you're stopped up for more than 24 hours, Segil says. WTF Is Water Fastening—And Is It Even Safe?However, any big change in urinary frequency can be an MS symptom in women, and is often how people end up getting diagnosed, he adds. Sometimes it's the opposite, and you have to pee all the time. "Many people with MS report a sense of 'gotta-go' bladder urgency or may need to use the restroom more frequently," says Costello. "Sometimes they are even awakened during the night by the urge to urinate." Dysfunctional bathroom habits and bowel problems occur in about 80 percent of people with MS, and the inability to hold in your pee is often accompanied by constipation, diarrhea, and uncontrollable bowel movements as well.11. You randomly get dizzy or nauseated. One of the earliest MS symptoms in women is extreme dizziness or vertigo caused by nerve damage that messes with your motor, sensory, and coordination systems, making you feel dizzy, dizzy, or even nauseated. 12. You're having trouble texting or typing. "One of the first things we often see in MS patients is the inability to text, type, use a cellphone or tablet, or do other things that require fine motor control," Segil says. As multiple sclerosis advances, it can cause "lesions," or areas of damage on your nervous system. If you get a lesion on the back region of the brain, it can hurt your manual dexterity, he explains.13. You're having trouble getting aroused. Sexual arousal starts in the central nervous system—so your brain actually has to send messages to your sexual organs to get them revved up. But in MS, since the brain-body connection isn't working properly, your body might not get the memo that you're ready for action, according to the National MS Society. Sexual problems are actually pretty common among women with MS—as many as 72 percent of female patients are affected by sexual issues including reduced sensation in the vaginal or clitoral area (or painfully heightened sensations), along with vaginal dryness. 14. You can't tell if something's hot or cold. An inability to sense temperature changes with your hands is another symptom of MS-induced nerve damage, Segil says.15. You've tested negative for every other disease, but you still feel ill. "Multiple sclerosis is considered one of the 'great masqueraders,' along with lupus, because its symptoms are so easily attributed to other causes or illnesses," Segil says. "Because the symptoms depend entirely on which nerves are affected, no two patients will present the same." For many women, this means that they only get an accurate diagnosis of MS after their doctors have ruled everything else out. Fortunately, an MRI scan can spot the telltale "lesions" of the disease, so don't be afraid to ask about getting tested for it, he adds. TypesStagesPediatric MSOutlookFAQTakeawayMS occurs when your immune system mistakenly targets your central nervous system (CNS). This damages the myelin sheath in your brain and spinal cord. The myelin sheath protects your nerve fibers and helps send nerve impulses down your spinal cord. Researchers are still working to understand how MS progresses. The condition is usually classified into types. However, research suggests MS may also be classified into stages. Keep reading to learn more about the types and stages of MS, and how your symptoms may progress.MS is usually classified into four types, partly based on how the condition progresses. CIS involves an isolated episode of neurological symptoms that may or may not recur. If it recurs, it will be a type of MS and no longer isolated.RRMS involves periods in which symptoms worsen, called flare-ups, and then improve. Between flare-ups, the changes that cause symptoms don't appear to progress. However, RRMS may eventually progress to secondary progressive MS. Over several decades, the course of RRMS will likely change and become more complex. RRMS affects 70-80% of people with MS.Some people with RRMS will go on to develop SPMS, a more aggressive form of MS. This generally happens within 10-25 years of the first diagnosis. SPMS involves relapses followed by partial recoveries or periods of remission. In SPMS, MS doesn't disappear between cycles but steadily worsens.PPMS has a slow and steady progression with no remission periods. There may be occasional plateaus in symptoms and minor improvements in function that tend to be temporary. The progression rate varies over time. About 10% of people with MS have this type.«MOREJoin Bezzy, a free MS community. With Bezzy, you're never alone.MS is complex. It's difficult to diagnose and hard to pinpoint when it starts and how it will progress before symptoms become visible. Experts are starting to think about MS in terms of phases.For example, research suggests that imaging studies have found that background disease activity occurs before symptoms appear. This is called the subclinical phase.Some experts also propose that there's enough evidence to describe the following three MS phases:High risk: A person notices early symptoms that may be a sign of MS.Relapsing-relmitting phase: Symptoms worsen during a flare-up and then improve or disappear for a while.Progressive phase: Symptoms become progressively more severe.This shows that the labels for different types of MS are not clear-cut. It might be more useful to describe MS in phases rather than types.For instance, RRMS may begin long before you notice any symptoms. This means that when you experience CIS, you may already have RRMS. A 2015 review suggests that 83% of people with MS have a history of CIS. After 15-20 years, around half of people who have experienced CIS go on to develop SPMS. Common early symptoms may include:Speak with a healthcare professional if you experience any of these symptoms. They could determine whether you're at high risk of developing MS based on your medical history and a physical exam.That said, it's important to note there's no definitive test to confirm the presence of MS. Many symptoms also occur with other conditions, so the disease can be hard to diagnose.For many people with MS, their symptoms will come and go over time. Flare-ups may last weeks or months. These could be followed by periods of remission, where symptoms may not appear for up to several years. During remissions, the disease doesn't appear to progress.Even among people with RRMS, the timeline varies widely between individuals.In this phase, MS symptoms become progressively worse. You may not experience any improvement or remission. Some people with MS never experience this.In the past, doctors have talked about RRMS becoming progressive MS, but this may be a stage that some people reach while others don't.«MOREJoin Bezzy, a free MS community. With Bezzy, you're never alone.Children and adolescents may receive a diagnosis of MS, known as pediatric-onset MS (POMS). The NMSS reports that 3-5% of all people with MS noticed symptoms that started before they were 16 years old.In children, MS tends to progress differently than in adults. It begins more aggressively, and there's a higher relapse rate early in the disease. Disease progression becomes slower over time, but if your MS began in childhood, it's more likely to reach the disability milestone at an earlier age than with adult-onset MS. Children with MS tend to have the relapsing-relmitting type rather than progressive MS. The outlook for MS varies widely among individuals. Symptoms typically worsen over time, but not always. MS doesn't follow any specific timeline or progression.According to the NMSS, around 2 in 3 people with MS will retain the ability to walk throughout their lives. However, some people may need assistive devices like a cane or crutches. If MS progresses to a more advanced stage, it can seriously affect quality of life. For instance, walking, writing, speaking, and thinking can become difficult.While rarely fatal, MS can shorten life expectancy by up to 7 years. You may need a caregiver to help with everyday tasks.If you receive a diagnosis of MS, it's important to remain in touch with your healthcare team. They can monitor your symptoms and change your treatment if MS seems to be worsening. Each person will have their own treatment plan.Learn about Medicare's coverage of MS treatment.It's hard to define or predict the stages of MS. In the past, doctors were more likely to refer to types, but some scientists now think it's more realistic to talk about a subclinical phase — when damage is occurring in the body but with no symptoms — followed by:A high risk phase, which is when you may start to have symptoms that could indicate MS.A remitting-relapsing phase, which is when symptoms come and go over time.A progressive phase, in which you no longer have periods with no symptoms. The four different types of MS are clinically isolated syndrome (CIS), relapsing-relmitting MS (RRMS), secondary progressive MS (SPMS), and primary progressive MS (PPMS).The life expectancy of someone with MS is 7 years shorter than someone without the condition, according to the NMSS. That said, the life expectancy varies for each person. On average, it's rising due to the development of new treatments. It's hard to determine the progression of MS because it varies for each person and may depend on the type. A 2016 study found that after 16 years, 18% of people with RRMS progressed to SPMS, and 10.7% now needed a cane to walk 100 meters. However, MS is a lifelong condition that may take years for symptoms to develop. MS can be difficult to predict, as it affects people differently. In some cases, symptoms may not worsen over time. For others, however, MS may progress rapidly and affect your ability to function in daily life. It's important to work with a doctor who will help you monitor your condition and adjust your treatment as needed over time.Healthline has strict sourcing guidelines and relies on peer-reviewed studies, academic research institutions, and medical journals and associations. We only use quality, credible sources to ensure content accuracy and integrity. You can learn more about how we ensure our content is accurate and current by reading our editorial policy. MS is a relapsing or progressive condition affecting the central nervous system (CNS). It occurs when the body's immune system mistakenly attacks the healthy nerves of the brain and spinal cord.Early intervention offers the best chance at preventing long-term disability. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize the initial symptoms of MS and seek prompt medical attention as soon as a person has concerns.Read on to learn more about the possible early signs and symptoms of MS. This article also looks at risk factors for MS and when to contact a doctor. For many people, fatigue and muscle weakness are the main symptoms of MS. Nerve damage in the spine and brain results in long-term (chronic) fatigue. This is called primary fatigue.Secondary fatigue can also occur as a result of other MS symptoms, such as pain or sleep problems.Learn more about fatigue and MS.Tingling and numbness are other common early warning signs of MS. These symptoms most often occur in the:Tingling and numbness can be mild or severe. These symptoms can also come and go.Learn about MS tingling patterns.Up to two-thirds of people with MS worldwide report that they experience pain with MS.Pain relating to the early stage of MS can affect the:Dizziness and balance problems affect many people with MS. With early MS, dizziness can be constant or intermittent. This can cause a person to:feel off balancelost frequentlyexperience near-falls or trippinglose their balancefind it difficult to walkCognitive (thinking) changes can be the first symptom of MS for some people.Over half of people with MS will experience cognitive changes at some point. These can include:difficulty finding wordsmemory lossdifficulty with the speed of processing informationSymptoms of MS can be different for each person and can also develop at different times.Some other symptoms that may occur with MS include:MS is an autoimmune condition that damages the CNS. The exact cause is not clear, though genetic and environmental factors likely play a role in its onset.Factors that may increase the likelihood of developing MS include:Anyone with early symptoms of MS should consult a doctor. Early diagnosis and treatment can provide the best chance of preventing disability.Many treatments can help slow the progression of MS, and medication can help ease symptoms such as pain, fatigue, and bladder problems.Dizziness is one of the most common symptoms of MS.MS can cause feelings of dizziness and vertigo. A person may feel lightheaded or as if their surroundings are spinning.Doctors may recommend motion sickness medication or short-term corticosteroids to treat dizziness due to MS.MS can cause dizziness but does not typically cause nausea. Other conditions, such as anxiety, migraine, and stomach illnesses, may cause dizziness and nausea, but people need to contact a doctor for a diagnosis.The signs of multiple sclerosis (MS) can vary widely. Early signs include vision changes, numbness and tingling, and muscle weakness. However, people may experience these symptoms at any point, although these issues may recur throughout the course of the disease.Symptoms typically begin between the ages of 20 and 40, but they can develop at any point.Anyone with concerns about symptoms that may indicate MS needs to talk with their doctor. A prompt diagnosis and early treatment may help reduce the likelihood of the condition progressing or causing disability.Read this article in Spanish.GeneticsMultiple SclerosisEye Health / BlindnessNeurology / Neuroscience

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