A Lifestyle Medicine Approach to MS



Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a condition that affects the brain and spinal cord. In MS, the immune system mistakenly attacks the protective coating around nerves, which can disrupt the signals between the brain and the rest of the body. Symptoms vary widely and may include fatigue, difficulty walking, numbness, vision problems and cognitive changes.

While there is no cure for MS, evidence suggests that healthy lifestyle choices can help manage symptoms, support wellbeing and complement medical treatment, as outlined below.

Food choices count

A Mediterranean-style eating pattern may help support overall wellbeing for people living with MS. This includes plenty of vegetables, fruit, whole grains, beans, nuts, seeds, oily fish and olive oil - foods rich in nutrients that support the immune system and general health.



Some people find they feel better when they limit ultra-processed foods, excess sugar, saturated fat and alcohol. Everyone is different, so it can help to make gradual changes and notice what works best for you.[1]

Get good quality sleep

Sleep plays an important role when you are living with MS. Poor sleep can worsen fatigue, low mood, difficulty thinking clearly and other MS symptoms, making day-to-day life feel harder than it needs to be.[2]

The good news is that improving your sleep can make a real difference. Good-quality rest supports your energy levels, lifts your mood, helps with concentration and memory, and strengthens your ability to cope with MS symptoms. To support better sleep, try keeping a regular bedtime, making your bedroom cool and dark, limiting caffeine and alcohol in the evening, and winding down with a calming routine before bed. Small, steady changes can add up over time.

Reduce smoking

Smoking is linked with worse MS outcomes, including faster progression and increased relapse risk. Vaping is not a safer alternative for overall health and may still affect breathing, circulation and recovery. If you smoke or vape, speak with your healthcare professional about support to quit — help is available, and stopping at any stage can benefit your health.[3]



References:

1. Koukach D, et al. From prevention to management: Exploring the impact of diet on multiple sclerosis. Transl Neurosci. 2025 May.
2. Wellbeing: Sleep. MS Trust.
3. Ramanujam R et al. Effect of Smoking Cessation on Multiple Sclerosis Prognosis. JAMA Neurol. 2015 Oct

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Movement matters



Gentle, regular physical activity can help with strength, balance, mobility, fatigue, mood and overall wellbeing when living with MS. You don't need to do anything intense — what matters most is finding movement that feels manageable and enjoyable for you.[4]

Activities like short walks, stretching, swimming, yoga or light cycling can all be beneficial. It's important to tailor activity to your own symptoms and abilities, and to take rest breaks whenever you need them. On harder days, even a few minutes of gentle movement counts. Over time, staying active in a way that works for you can make a real difference to how you feel day to day.

Stress management for MS



Looking after your emotional and mental wellbeing is just as important as managing physical symptoms when living with MS. Good emotional wellbeing can help with coping, resilience, relationships and overall quality of life.[5]

There are practical ways to support how you feel. Staying connected with friends, family or support groups can reduce isolation and provide encouragement. Making time for rest and activities you enjoy helps protect your energy and mood. Relaxation techniques or mindfulness, even for a few minutes a day, can ease tension and promote calm. If you notice your mood dropping or anxiety becoming difficult to manage, seeking support early from your healthcare team or a counsellor can make a real difference — help is available, and asking for it is a sign of strength.

Social connection can ease stress

Maintaining healthy relationships and staying socially connected can help reduce the impact of stress on both mental and physical health. Having people to talk to may reduce feelings of isolation, provide emotional reassurance and make everyday pressures feel less overwhelming.[6]



Spending time with friends, family, support groups or community networks can offer encouragement, practical help and a sense of belonging. Supportive relationships make stress feel easier to manage and can improve overall resilience during difficult times.

References:

4. Halabchi F, Alizadeh Z, Sahraian MA, Abolhasani M. Exercise prescription for patients with multiple sclerosis; potential benefits and practical recommendations. BMC Neurol. 2017 Sep 16.
5. Reynard AK, Sullivan AB, Rae-Grant A. A systematic review of stress-management interventions for multiple sclerosis patients. Int J MS Care. 2014
6. Ratajska A, Glanz BI, Chitnis T, Weiner HL, Healy BC. Social support in multiple sclerosis: Associations with quality of life, depression, and anxiety. J Psychosom Res. 2020 Nov

The advice contained within this factsheet is as accurate and as comprehensive as possible, but it is only general advice, and should not be used as a substitute for the individual advice received from consulting a person's own doctor.
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