Multiple Sclerosis (MS)

Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a disease of the central nervous system. Its cause is unknown. It is more common in the northern states than in the southern states. There is a higher incidence of MS in women. There is a wide variation in the *symptoms* (problems) of MS. This is because of the many different ways it affects the central nervous system. It often comes on in episodes or attacks. These attacks may last weeks to months. There may be long periods of nearly no problems between attacks. The **main symptoms include** visual problems (associated with eye pain), numbness, weakness, and paralysis in *extremities* (arms/hands and legs/feet). There may also be tremors and problems with balance and walking. The age when MS starts is variable. Advances in medicine continue to improve the treatment of this illness. There is no known cure for MS but there are medications that help. MS is not an inherited illness, although your risk of getting this disease is higher if you have a relative with MS. The best *radiologic* (x-ray) study for MS is an *MRI* (magnetic resonance imaging). There are medications available to decrease the number and frequency of attacks.

SYMPTOMS

The symptoms of MS are caused by loss of insulation *(myelin)* of the nerves of the brain. When this happens, brain signals do not get transmitted properly or may not get transmitted at all. **Some of the problems caused by this include:**

- Numbness
- Weakness
- Paralysis in extremities
- Visual problems, eye pain
- Balance problems
- Tremors

DIAGNOSIS

Your caregiver can do studies on you to make this diagnosis. This may include specialized x-rays and spinal fluid studies.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Take medications as directed by your caregiver. Baclofen® is a drug commonly used to reduce muscle spasticity. Steroids are often used for short term relief.
- Exercise as directed.
- Use physical and occupational therapy as directed by your caregiver. Careful attention to this medical care can help avoid depression.
- See your caregiver if you begin to have problems with depression. This is a common problem in MS. Patients often continue to work many years after the diagnosis of MS.

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