

# Primary progressive multiple sclerosis



Your doctor has told you that you have this form of the disease. Here's what you need to know about it.

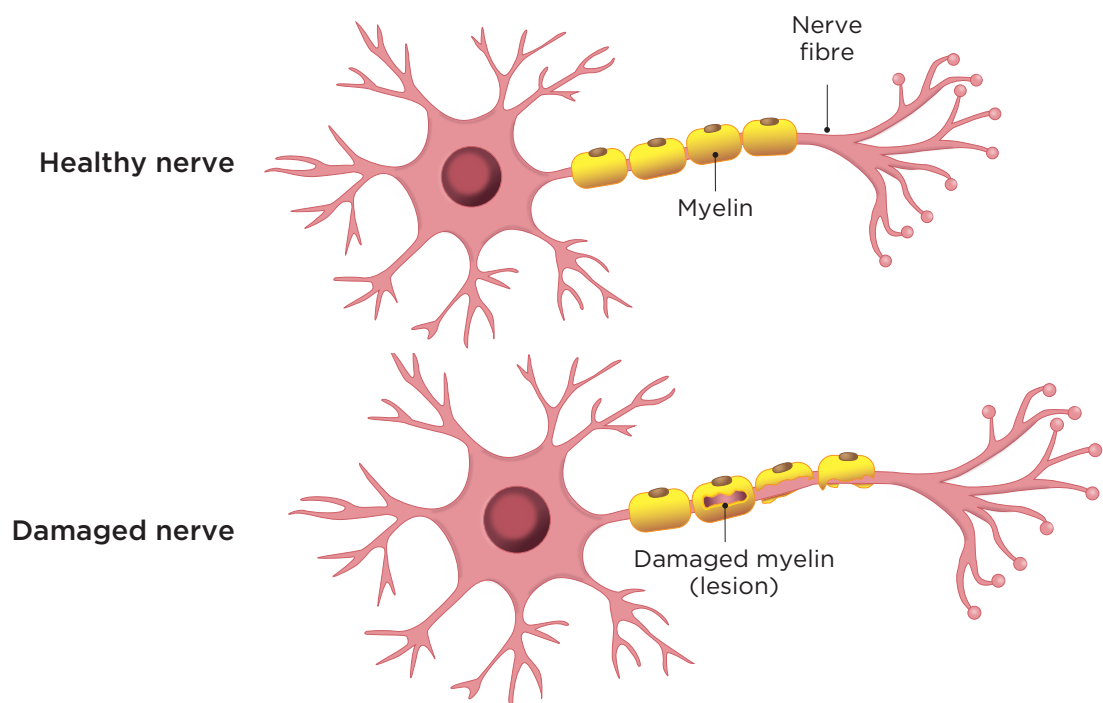
## What is multiple sclerosis?

It's a disease that's called "autoimmune". Cells that should be defending your body (immune system cells) start attacking:

- the nerves in your brain
- the nerves in your spinal cord
- the nerves that connect your eyes to your brain (optic nerves).

This causes inflammation. This inflammation damages a layer called myelin, which covers nerves to protect them. Myelin also helps nerve signals travel.

This damage creates what are called "lesions" or "plaques" on the nerves. Because of these lesions, nerve signals don't get through as well.



## Why do I have this disease?

Multiple sclerosis affects 1 in 500 people in Quebec. The exact cause is not yet known.

The risk of passing the disease on to your child is low. However, certain genes and conditions can increase the risk of developing the disease. For example, vitamin D deficiency and smoking will slightly increase the risk of developing it.

## What are the symptoms?

They differ from one person with the disease to another. You may have one or more of the following symptoms:

- Loss of sensation to touch
- Vision problems
- Balance problems
- Difficulty moving
- Weakness
- Numbness
- Sudden tension of the muscles (spasms)
- Difficulty holding back the urge to urinate or emptying the bladder
- Sexual function disorders (e.g., problems getting an erection, decreased sexual desire, etc.)
- Fatigue



## Why is it called primary progressive?

Multiple sclerosis takes several forms. It's "primary progressive" when symptoms develop little by little, over time. You gradually experience difficulties in your daily activities.

In general, the symptoms don't develop in relapses. That is, they don't develop quickly and intensely. Relapses are mainly caused by another form of multiple sclerosis.

## What exams will I need to have?

To monitor the progression of your disease, you'll have exams:

- In the clinic. Your neurologist will assess your vision, your movements, your strength, your sensibility, your balance.
- In radiology. You'll have a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan. It's done to see if you have new lesions. It's also used to see how the lesions already present in the nerves of your brain or spinal cord are progressing. The frequency of these exams differs from one person to another.



Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) machine

## How can the disease be treated?

There's no cure for multiple sclerosis. However, there is a medication that can slow its progression in some people. This medication reduces your immune system's attacks on your nerves and helps prevent new lesions from forming on the nerves.

In this way, the medication can help you maintain your abilities. It can also help you live an active life longer.

This medication is not recommended for all people with primary progressive multiple sclerosis.

In some cases, it may provide little benefit and cause side effects. Your doctor will assess whether this medication is right for you.

## How can I take care of myself now?

There's no cure for the disease. But certain lifestyle habits can help slow down its progression.

We recommend:

- eating fruits, vegetables, and foods rich in fiber. This helps reduce inflammation.
- being physically active on a regular basis, while respecting your limitations. This also decreases inflammation.
- engaging in social and intellectual activities. This helps keep the nervous system healthy.
- finding ways to manage stress. See the health sheet [\*Relaxation for better stress management\*](#).

Your care team can also advise you on items to get and how to set up your home to help you live better with the disease.

## Can I have a child and breastfeed?

You can become a parent if you have multiple sclerosis, whether you're a woman or a man.

Women can give birth vaginally and with an epidural. It's also possible to breastfeed.

However, it's important to talk with your care team when planning a pregnancy.



## Can I drive a car?

Yes. However, you must inform the Société de l'assurance automobile du Québec (SAAQ) that you have this disease.

Stay alert to symptoms that may affect your driving, such as vision problems or difficulty moving. If you have any symptoms, talk to your family doctor and care team.

