Living Your Best Life with MS

When you have MS, it can feel like health care means “MS care.” Keeping MS appointments and taking MS medications is important, but it’s also important to take care of your general health. Some health concerns you might have are not related to MS. And some healthy behaviors can help MS symptoms. You can think of your general health like a garden. When you take care of a garden, you benefit from the flowers, fruits, and vegetables. You can grow a garden somewhere it is difficult for plants to live—they just need extra care. In the same way, you can keep yourself healthy, even with MS. And you and your loved ones benefit when you take care of your health.

Important Health Areas to Watch with MS

**Diet**—So far, there is no particular diet to treat MS. But good nutrition helps your general health. Also, what you put into your body affects your immune system and level of inflammation.

**Exercise**—Research shows that certain exercises can help MS symptoms. For example, balance and eye-movement training may help tiredness, and weight training can help walking and quality of life. Stretching can help relieve tight muscles.

**Sleep**—Rest when you need to. Naps can ease fatigue and frustration. Talk to your health care provider about how much sleep is enough.

**Emotions, stress, and mental health**—Find someone to listen to you. Meeting other people with MS can really help.

**General health**—If you smoke, stop. It may speed MS progression. Get wellness checks, Pap smears, and other regular health care on time.

**Stress**—Learn stress-relief techniques. Exercise to relieve stress, and prioritize daily activities.

**Intimacy and sex**—Write down changes in your sexual feelings or activity, whether you think they are from MS or not. Then ask your health care provider about them. There are many ways to help some of these problems.

**Bladder and bowel changes**—Bladder and bowel problems are common in MS. For example, you might need to urinate urgently or have urinary tract infections, difficult bowel movements, or leaks. There are ways to help.

Online Resources to explore:

- [www.nationalmssociety.org](http://www.nationalmssociety.org)
  - Resources & Support
  - Food for Thought—MS and Nutrition
  - Exercise as Part of Everyday Life
  - You Can...Get the Sleep You Need
  - MS & Wellness: Living Well with Multiple Sclerosis
  - Taming Stress in Multiple Sclerosis
  - Intimacy and Sexuality
  - Get Control of Bladder & Bowel Issues

- [www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com)
  - MS and Your Diet: Is There a Link?
  - How to Find a Therapist

- [www.mymsaa.org](http://www.mymsaa.org)
  - Manage My MS

- [www.ymca.net](http://www.ymca.net)
  - Physical and Aqua Therapy

- [www.mscando.org](http://www.mscando.org)
  - Online Community
My Personal Health Goals

If you are not sure what a good goal is, ask your health care provider. The chart below has an example of a personal health goal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>What I was able to do</th>
<th>How it worked</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example: Eat 3 servings of fruit every day.</td>
<td>1 – Buy fruit when I shop for groceries 2 – Eat a piece of fruit with breakfast each day 3 – Start having fruit with pm snack</td>
<td>Bought fruit, ate banana on cereal every day. Ate apple with pm snack 1 day, but mostly forgot. Will try again next week. 😊</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Goal 1

Goal 2

Goal 3

The chart has space for 3 goals, but you don’t need to work on all 3 at once. Focus on the goals that are most important to you.

Notes

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Find an MS Center

You, and your MS, are unique, and MS can be different each day. If you notice new symptoms or changes, visiting an MS center might help. Military veterans can also visit Veterans Affairs (VA) centers.

The Consortium of Multiple Sclerosis Centers (CMSC; www.mscare.org) has a directory of centers where you can be evaluated and find more resources, such as physical and occupational therapy and other rehabilitation. From the home page, choose “Directories,” then select MS or VA centers and follow the prompts. Check with your local chapter of the National MS Society if you are not near a CMSC-recognized MS center. You can always create a “virtual MS center” by helping your health care providers connect with each other.

Community Resources