

MS in Women: Common Symptoms

[Multiple sclerosis \(MS\)](#) is considered an autoimmune condition that affects the brain and spinal cord of the central nervous system. The disease affects women more often than men.

According to the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, women may be up to [three times](#) more likely than men to get MS. The disease can also cause symptoms specific to women. But women and men share most of the same [symptoms of MS](#).

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Bezzly MS provides meaningful peer connections, empathetic ears, and real-world ideas for living well — inspired by guides and members who truly understand what it's like living with Multiple Sclerosis.

MS symptoms specific to women

The MS symptoms that primarily affect women seem to relate to hormone levels.

Some researchers think that having lower levels of [testosterone](#) may play a role. Others think fluctuations in female hormones may be a factor.

More research is needed to determine the true causes of these symptom differences.

The main symptoms that affect women more than men include menstrual problems, pregnancy-related symptoms, and menopause issues.

Menstrual problems

[Research](#) has shown that some women have increased MS symptoms during their periods. That may be because of a drop in estrogen levels during that time.

Symptoms that worsened for study participants included weakness, imbalance, depression, and fatigue.

Pregnancy-related symptoms

Some good news for women with MS: Research has found that MS has no effect on fertility. That means that MS won't keep you from [getting pregnant and giving birth](#) to a healthy child.

In even better news, for most women, MS symptoms actually stabilize or improve during pregnancy, especially during the second and third trimesters. However, it's common for them to return following delivery.

Menopause

Some [research](#) has found that in some women, MS symptoms get worse after [menopause](#). As with

menstrual symptoms, this may be due to a drop in estrogen levels caused by menopause.

[Studies](#) have shown that [hormone replacement therapy \(HRT\)](#) helps ease these symptoms for postmenopausal women.

However, HRT has also been linked with increased risk of breast cancer, heart disease, and stroke. If you have questions about whether HRT might be helpful for you in managing your MS symptoms after menopause, talk to your doctor.

MS symptoms that affect both women and men

In general, MS symptoms are the same for both women and men. But the symptoms vary for everyone depending on the location and severity of nerve damage caused by inflammation.

Some of the most common MS symptoms are listed below.

Muscle symptoms

In MS, the body's immune cells attack the nervous system. This can occur in the brain, spinal cord, or optic nerves. As a result, MS patients can experience muscle-related symptoms that include:

- [muscle spasms](#)
- numbness
- [balance problems](#) and lack of coordination
- difficulty moving arms and legs
- unsteady gait and trouble walking
- weakness or [tremor](#) in one or both arms or legs

Eye symptoms

[Vision problems](#) can occur in both men and women with MS. These can include:

- vision loss, either partial or complete, which often occurs in one eye
- pain when moving your eyes
- double vision
- blurred vision
- involuntary eye movements
- more generalized eye discomfort and visual difficulties

All of these eye symptoms are due to MS lesions in the part of the brain that's responsible for controlling and coordinating vision.

Bowel and bladder changes

Both [bladder dysfunction](#) and [bowel symptoms](#) occur frequently in MS. Dysfunction in the pathways of the nervous system that control your bladder and bowel muscles cause these problems.

Possible bladder and bowel symptoms include:

- trouble starting to urinate
- [frequent urge or need to urinate](#)
- [bladder infections](#)
- [urine](#) or stool leakage
- [constipation](#)
- [diarrhea](#)

Numbness or pain

Feelings of [numbness](#), tingling, and [pain](#) are common for many people with MS. People often experience these symptoms across the body or in specific limbs.

You might notice numbness that feels like “pins and needles” or a burning sensation. According to [research](#), more than half of all people with MS will have some form of pain during their illness.

While some types of pain are related directly to MS, other forms of pain may be byproducts of how MS affects the body. For example, imbalances caused by walking problems may lead to pain from stress on your joints.

Trouble with speech and swallowing

People with MS may experience trouble speaking. Common speech problems include:

- slurred or poorly articulated speech
- a loss of volume control
- a slowed-down rate of speaking
- changes in speech quality, such as a harsh-sounding or breathless voice

MS lesions can also influence [swallowing](#), causing problems with chewing and moving food to the back of your mouth. Lesions can also affect your body’s ability to move food through your esophagus and into your stomach.

Effects on the brain and nerves

A range of other brain and nerve symptoms may result from MS. These can include:

- decreased attention span
- [memory loss](#)
- poor judgment
- trouble reasoning or problem solving
- [depression](#), either from damage to brain areas involved in emotional control or as a result of the

stress of the illness

- [mood swings](#)
- dizziness, balance problems, or [vertigo](#) (a spinning sensation)

Sexual problems

Both men and women can experience [sexual dysfunction](#) as a symptom of MS. Problems might include:

- decreased sex drive
- reduced genital sensation
- fewer and less intense orgasms

Additionally, women may notice reduced vaginal lubrication and pain during intercourse.