

# Key facts and figures about multiple sclerosis

**Multiple sclerosis (MS)** is a chronic disease that attacks the central nervous system (the brain, spinal cord and optic nerves). The progress, severity and specific symptoms of MS cannot be predicted. MS is a lifelong disease for which a cause and cure are yet to be found; however, doctors and scientists are making discoveries about the treatment and management of MS every day.

## General facts about MS

- Statistics show that 1 in 20 Australians will be touched by MS through a family member, colleague or friend who is living with the disease.
- It is estimated that over 21,000 people in Australia have MS.<sup>1</sup>
- An additional 1,000 Australians are diagnosed with MS every year, equating to approximately four people every working day.<sup>2</sup>
- 2.5 million people are living with MS worldwide.<sup>3</sup>
- MS is the most common disease of the central nervous system in young adults.<sup>3</sup>
- Diagnosis of MS is typically between 20 and 40 years of age, although onset of symptoms may be earlier.<sup>3</sup>
- In Australia, MS affects three times as many women as men and the gap is widening.<sup>5</sup>

## Common symptoms of MS

No two cases of MS are identical. The visible and hidden symptoms of MS are unpredictable and vary from person to person and from time to time in the same person.

Common symptoms include:

- extreme tiredness (unusual fatigue)
- visual disturbance, such as blurred or double vision
- difficulties with walking, balance or coordination
- altered muscle tone, such as muscle weakness, tremor, stiffness or spasms
- dizziness and vertigo
- altered sensation, such as tingling, numbness or pins and needles
- sensitivity to heat and/or cold
- pain
- bladder and bowel changes
- emotional and mood changes
- sexual changes
- changes in memory, concentration or reasoning
- slurring or slowing of speech.

## The economic and personal cost of MS

- MS is estimated to cost Australia over \$1 billion each year.<sup>1</sup>
  - Loss of productivity because of MS costs \$494 million per year.<sup>1</sup>
  - Australians with MS spend \$78 million per year in out of pocket health care expenses.<sup>1</sup>
  - The care provided by family and other informal carers to Australians with MS would cost \$145 million per year to replace.<sup>1</sup>
  - 50–80% of people with MS cease to work full-time within 10 years of diagnosis.<sup>4</sup>
  - People with MS have a 30% higher representation in part-time employment, compared to the average Australian.<sup>4</sup>
  - In 2005, 52% of people with MS had an annual income below \$26,000, or less than \$500 per week.<sup>6</sup>
  - People with MS are less likely to be in paid employment compared to those with other chronic diseases.<sup>7</sup>
- 

## How you can help

- **Call 1800 CURE MS** (1800 287 367) to make a donation.
  - **Volunteer** your time to MS Australia.
  - **Participate in fundraising events** such as MS Readathon, bike rides, walks, fun runs and more.  
For events details, visit our website at [www.msaustralia.org.au/supportus.asp](http://www.msaustralia.org.au/supportus.asp)
  - **For media enquiries**, please phone (02) 9646 0600.
- 

## References

1. Convince & Menzies Research Institute. Economic impact of multiple sclerosis in 2010: Australian MS Longitudinal Study. Prepared for MS Research Australia. North Ryde: Convince Pty Ltd; 2011.
  2. Taylor BV, Lucas R, Dear K, Kilpatrick TJ, Pender MP, van der Mei IAF, et al. Latitudinal variance in incidence and type of first central nervous system demyelinating events. *Multiple sclerosis* 2010; 16(4):398-405.
  3. Multiple Sclerosis International Federation. What is MS? London: Multiple Sclerosis International Federation [cited 16 Nov 2011]. Available from: [www.msif.org/en/about\\_ms/what\\_is\\_ms.html](http://www.msif.org/en/about_ms/what_is_ms.html)
  4. Access Economics. Acting positively: strategic implications of the economic costs of multiple sclerosis in Australia. Report prepared for MS Australia. Canberra: Access Economics Pty Ltd 2005.
  5. Simmons R. Australian MS longitudinal study. Canberra: Canberra Hospital 2009.
  6. Summers M, Simmons R. Keeping cool survey: air conditioner use by Australians with MS. Public policy related results and recommendations. Melbourne: MS Australia 2009.
  7. Simmons R, McDonald E. Living with multiple sclerosis: longitudinal changes in employment and the importance of symptom management. *J Neurol* 2010.
- 

**For information about MS and MS Australia services:**

**Free call: 1800 042 138**

**Web: [www.msaustralia.org.au](http://www.msaustralia.org.au)**

---