

information

MANAGEMENT OF MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

There is, at present, no known cure for multiple sclerosis (MS). However, this does not mean that the disease is untreatable. Individual symptoms can be treated and in some instances the course of the disease can be altered and slowed down.

The major health problems the person with MS will encounter can be put into four groups:

- Motor problems – limb functions, spasticity and/or weakness.
- Sensory symptoms – “pins and needles,” numbness, etc.
- Neuropsychological problems – memory, cognitive problems.
- Bowel and bladder problems, sexual problems.

The management strategies used to assist people with MS have three aims:

1. To decrease the frequency and severity of exacerbations (attacks) and thus slow down the progress of the disease.
2. To shorten exacerbations.
3. To minimise and control specific symptoms, such as fatigue, motor problems, memory problems, etc.

The person with MS may discover many proposed treatments for the disease, ranging from the traditional medical to the more alternative or complementary approaches.

TREATMENT OF MS PROBLEMS

There are several drugs prescribed to treat the disease process in MS. Before it is accepted, each new drug undergoes rigorous clinical trials for several years until the medical world is convinced the drug helps the person with MS in a safe and effective way.

At present, disease management drugs include:

- Immunotherapy drugs
- Immunosuppressant drugs

For an overview of MS symptom management, please refer to the booklet, *MS: The Mystery Disease*.

PHYSICAL THERAPIES IN THE MANAGEMENT OF MS PROBLEMS

- Exercise: the physiotherapist may suggest various types of exercise, such as passive stretching, range of motion exercises, balancing exercises.

- Activities of Daily Living: the occupational therapist may suggest alternative ways of doing things at work and around the house which are not as taxing or exhausting. The neuro-psychologist may suggest techniques to help memory problems.
- Aids: it may be appropriate for you to consider using some equipment to help you do things, but first be sure to discuss this with a health professional at MS Australia.
- Speech and vision problems can be assisted by referral to the appropriate therapist and ophthalmologist – discuss this with your doctor or MS Australia health professionals.

COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE MEDICINES AND MS

Complementary and alternative medicines can include acupuncture, hypnosis, yoga, vitamin supplements, aromatherapy, etc.

Some complementary and alternative medicines do have a positive effect on a person coping with chronic illness, some could be called eccentric, some are dangerous. It is wise to discuss these sorts of therapies with your doctor before embarking on them. While keeping an open mind on the subject of complementary and alternative medicines, we need to be sure that using them will do no harm and will, in fact, show a true benefit.

PERHAPS A COMBINATION?

MS is a disease of great variability – no two people with MS have precisely the same symptoms. So treatment that suits one person may not suit another.

Many people with MS will find relief from their symptoms as a result of a combination of mainstream medicine with complementary and alternative medicines, judiciously chosen after consultation with their medical doctor.

Keep in contact with your doctor and health professionals.

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