

# Life with MS:

## Mastering Early Treatment



MASTERING



Multiple Sclerosis

## Essential Information About MS

Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a disease that attacks the central nervous system (CNS). MS usually progresses over time, but early diagnosis and treatment may help slow disease progression. It is important that people recognize the symptoms of MS as early as possible. Research has found that starting treatment after the first clinical attack suggestive of MS could slow disease progression and delay disabilities. People with MS who begin treatment after their diagnosis can also benefit from long-term, consistent treatment.

For more information about MS, visit:

<http://www.ms-gateway.ie>

## Mastering MS

Mastering MS is a global awareness campaign designed to illustrate how MS can affect a person's personal relationships and work life, whether as a spouse, parent, child, friend or coworker. The campaign shows that with the right tools, people with MS can continue to lead physically and emotionally fulfilling lives. The campaign offers resources to help people with MS manage their condition, as well as to better cope with changes that may occur in their personal and professional relationships.

# Every Moment Counts

Being diagnosed with MS can be frightening. You may be confused about what the disease really is, or concerned about how it will affect your life and your family, and whether you'll be able to keep working or enjoying your normal activities.

You may gain control of your MS—by starting an effective disease-modifying treatment early, you may reduce the number of relapses and delay disabilities that can affect you later in life.

This brochure explains the benefit of early treatment, including some conversation starters to help you talk to your doctor to determine if early treatment is right for you.

Asking the right questions is important. So, if you've recently been diagnosed or are experiencing symptoms of MS, talk with your doctor right away.

## What is Early Treatment?

If you have been diagnosed with MS on clinical grounds, that means you've already experienced two separate “*clinical events*” or attacks suggestive of the disease. Today, doctors can determine if you've had an MS attack even if you had only one attack in addition to MRI features consistent with MS. MRI is a Magnetic Resonance Imaging scanner that images—creates pictures—of the brain.

### **The earlier you visit a doctor, the better.**

This means, if you have MS, you may do more to slow disease progression and delay disabilities by beginning treatment with a drug called an interferon beta at diagnosis, rather than waiting until your symptoms get worse. Recent clinical research also has found that starting interferon beta treatment even earlier—after the first attack suggestive of MS and have MRI features consistent with MS—may provide even greater benefits.

*“Early treatment means that the patient has had one episode that is suggestive of MS and consistent findings on MRI. From an academic point of view, they don't yet have MS, but you may be pretty sure that they will develop MS based on the results of the MRI and other tests. That is the point at which we should consider starting treatment.”*

**– Dr. Xavier Montalban, Spain**







# Why Early Treatment?

*"It is important for patients to be diagnosed and offered effective treatment options early. It is known that irreversible neurological damage may occur before a definite clinical diagnosis of MS is established."* – **Dr. Karl Baum, Germany**

Right now, you may be thinking, *"I don't have any symptoms of MS. I feel just fine—why do I need to be on treatment?"*

It's natural to be hesitant about starting treatment. But it's important to remember that while you may look and feel fine on the surface, underneath the disease may be causing damage to nerves in the brain and spinal cord. Some of this nerve damage cannot be reversed.

In fact, MS may cause four times more nerve damage in the first year of the disease than later on.<sup>1</sup> That damage may eventually affect the way you walk, see, and even the way your brain processes information.

Getting effective treatment early may delay this damage and these disabilities.

*"I think early treatment is vital. I can still enjoy a very full life—I play tennis, I ski, I even played rugby last year. When I was first diagnosed, they told me I would not play again. The truth is, I have full mobility and lead an active life due to early treatment."* – **Philip, Switzerland**

1. Kuhlmann T, Lingfeld G, Bitsch A, Schuchardt J, Brück W. Acute axonal damage in multiple sclerosis is most extensive in early disease stages and decreases over time. *Brain*. 2002;125:2202-2212.

## Getting Help Right Away

As a pediatric nurse, Louise of the UK was familiar with many diseases, but had never encountered MS. So when she suffered her first MS attack, she wasn't quite sure what she was experiencing. *"When my first symptoms of MS appeared, I was frightened."* When Louise got to work, she noticed that she couldn't write very well.

After being referred to a neurologist, she was diagnosed with MS and prescribed medication to manage the first attack. Knowing the importance of early treatment, Louise's neurologist and MS nurses helped get her on medication as early as possible. Once she started, *"The Louise that I was before the diagnosis was back. I felt like I could keep living, enjoying nights out with my friends and getting away with them."*





## Take Back Control

Wendy of The Netherlands first realized something was not right when she felt tingling sensations in her legs and then later in her arms as well. Sometimes, she lost control of her legs and walked as if she were drunk. Her whole world turned upside down the day she learned she had MS.

*"I was angry. Why did this happen to me? I felt insecure about my future."*

Having MS means you will need to face many changes and some new challenges in life. There are some things that you will not be able to change or control.

But by starting treatment early—and staying on it—You can take control of the disease.

In some ways, early treatment is like putting on your seat belt in the car before driving—it helps to slow down or prevent future damage to your body.

Fortunately for Wendy, her neurologist knew the importance of early treatment and started her immediately on a disease-modifying medication. *"The treatment has become part of my daily life. I know why it is important and I am committed to staying on treatment."*

## Early Treatment Prevents Disease Progression

By slowing the progression of the disease, you will have fewer exacerbations.

Before Kyoko of Japan started treatment, she experienced symptoms two to three times a year. She had to stop running and jet skiing because the symptoms were unbearable. *"It was not unusual for me to be hospitalized for two to three weeks each year."*

After starting interferon beta treatment, Kyoko's relapses dropped to less than one per year. She no longer needed to be hospitalized. *"Therapies that prevent symptoms from recurring and delay disease progression are important for people with MS like me. My future is brighter because of the treatments available to me."*

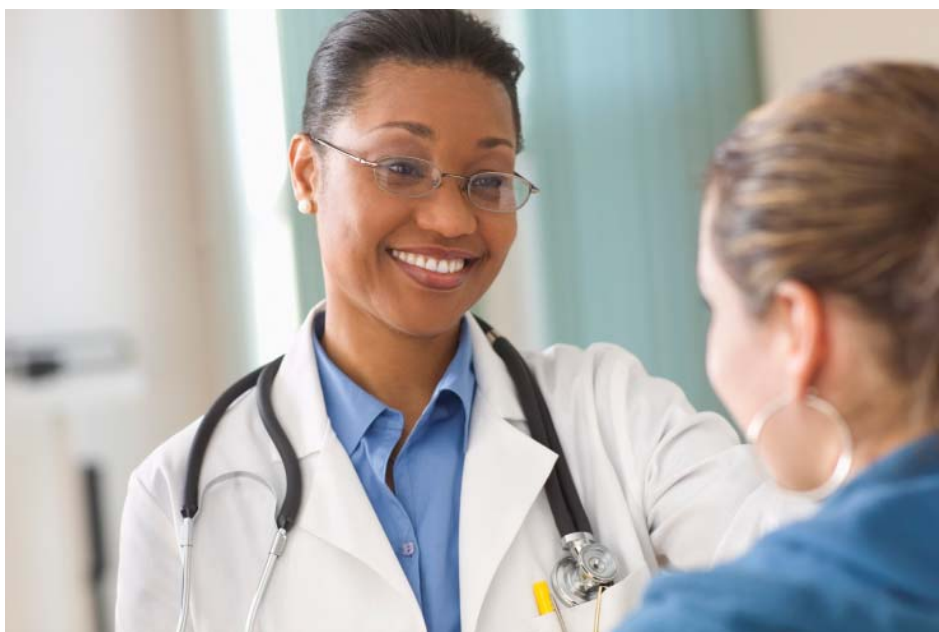
In early treatment studies like CHAMPS, ETOMS, BENEFIT and PreCISe, people treated early with disease-modifying drugs had a lower risk of disease progression later on. In one particular study, people treated early with interferon beta were less likely to develop disability after three years of treatment compared to people treated later.



## Talking To Your Doctor

Finding answers about your MS treatment is easier when you ask the right questions.

This section provides you with important tips for talking to your doctor, including questions to help you start the conversation about early treatment.



## Involving Your Family Early

Involving your family in your care early is important. It helps them feel like they are part of the process from the beginning.

- **Listen to your family:** Sometimes those closest to you, such as your partner or best friend, may notice changes in your symptoms before you do. Keeping track of your health may also mean listening to their observations.
- **Bring a family member with you to the doctor.** Let them learn more about your condition firsthand. Being at the doctor's office also allows them the opportunity to ask questions and get involved in your treatment.

Don't go through this difficult time alone. Your loved ones will have a better idea of how to support you if they are involved.

*– Denise Knowles, Relationship Expert*

# Questions To Ask Your Doctor

- Which drugs are used to prevent progression of the disease?
- Are any of these proven to delay disability when started early in the course of the disease?
- How will I know if the drugs are working?
- What side effects and precautions should I be aware of, and how should I respond to them?
- How can my family help make sure I am following my treatment plan in the approved manner?
- Is there anything else I can do to cope with attacks?
- How can my family help me cope with these attacks?
- What do you recommend for treating the symptoms of my MS (like muscle spasms or pain)?
- Are there any local support groups, for me and/or my family?

## Contributors



**Denise Knowles** is a certified relationship counselor, psychosexual therapist and media specialist. She has more than 16 years of experience helping couples and families deal with different life issues, including the challenges associated with the diagnosis of a chronic illness like MS.

All the people with MS mentioned in the “Mastering MS” brochures have been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS), and are currently receiving treatment for their disease.

The testimonials represent each person’s own experience, both with the disease and any treatment history. Statements regarding MS treatment represent the individual’s own experience and perspective. Not all people receiving treatment will have the same results.

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