



**Taking an active role in living well with MS
can best be summarized like this:**

W*eighing options*

E*ating well*

L*iving to your fullest*

L*earning new skills*

N*eeding others*

E*valuating situations realistically*

S*urviving stress*

S*taying responsible*

Nancy Holland & June Halper, Editors,
Multiple Sclerosis: A Self-Care Guide to Wellness.

¹Multiple Sclerosis Association of America Web site. http://www.msassociation.org/about_multiple_sclerosis/newlydiagnosed/. Accessed February 27, 2009.

²Multiple Sclerosis International Federation Web site. http://www.msif.org/en/about_ms/index.html. Accessed February 27, 2009.



essential elements

The Basis of **Understanding**



THE CONSORTIUM OF
MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS CENTERS

The Basis of Understanding

MS Facts: What you need to know



You are not alone. When you first find out you have MS, it is natural to feel isolated and lonely. But you are not alone. Today you are among the 400,000 people in the United States with the diagnosis of MS,¹ and among an estimated 2 million people worldwide.² Most people are diagnosed between the ages of 20 and 50 years, but no two people are the same, including your age at diagnosis.

MS is nobody's fault, and there is nothing that you or someone else did that caused it to develop. MS does not appear to be genetically linked, although having a family history of MS may slightly increase the risk of developing it. MS is not contagious and does not shorten your life expectancy. It may not be curable or preventable at this time, but treatments are available to control its symptoms and slow its progression. There is

worldwide research that each day moves us closer to discover why it occurs and how to prevent it.

MS is the result of damage to myelin, the tissue that covers and protects our nerves. When myelin is damaged, scars form and interfere with the nerve signals that are sent through the central nervous system between the brain and spinal cord to other parts of the body.

MS is different in different people. Symptoms can vary greatly from one person to another. And there are even different types of MS. For some, its course is characterized by periods of relapse and remission (symptoms that come and go), while for others it has a progressive pattern (it can slowly worsen over time).

*Multiple refers to many;
sclerosis refers to scars.*

Common early symptoms of MS

- Numbness or tingling, usually in an arm or leg
- Fatigue (tiredness)
- Blurry vision, double vision, or loss of vision
- Problems with elimination
- Pain or strange sensations
- Changes in memory
- Tripping, falling, or difficulty walking

MS Fiction: Clarifying some common misconceptions

Great strides have been made in the diagnosis and treatment of MS over the past 10 years. There are many common misconceptions you, your friends, or family members may have heard about MS, but here are the facts:

Fiction: MS treatments do not work.

Fact: There are many effective treatments available to help people cope with the condition. Medicines can now slow worsening of MS, reduce relapses (also called exacerbations or flare-ups), manage symptoms, and improve function. When expertly prescribed, these treatments can enhance the quality of life for people living with MS.

Fiction: People with MS end up in wheelchairs.

Fact: Most people with MS (about 75%) do not require a mobility device. As people with MS age, and if the condition progresses, the chance of needing a wheelchair or mobility device increases just as it does in the rest of the aging population. To help you manage your future travels more smoothly, we have included a Travel Assistance Request card in the **Essential Elements** kit. Have

your healthcare team help you fill in the information on the card so that airport personnel can contact them with questions if you choose to ask for a private individual screening.

Fiction: People with MS cannot work or have children.

Fact: Many people with MS continue to work full time. Some choose to work in settings that are fulfilling and satisfying, as most experts advise that people with MS expend their physical and emotional energy wisely. For women of childbearing age, there is generally no reason why you cannot give birth or raise a family. Having MS does not hinder your ability to be a good parent. The risk of passing MS on to your children is only between 1 and 5 percent.

Fiction: MS can be cured through dietary or lifestyle changes.

Fact: A balanced diet, regular exercise, and a positive outlook are recommended for everyone and will certainly contribute to your health and well-being. Fitness and wellness are relevant to everyone and MS is no exception.