

A-Z of MS

So you're here because you've been affected by MS in some way. It's pretty confusing as it shows up in everyone differently, but hopefully our team of MS Trust reporters can help you to understand more. Here they are with our A to Z of MS.

A is for autoimmunity. MS is an autoimmune disease, which basically means that your immune system, which is the part of your body that fights off bugs and other nasties, has had a massive fail, and starts to attack your body instead.

B is for brain health. We all know how important it is to keep your body healthy, but keeping your brain fit is really important too, especially when you've got MS. You could do this by... exercising, brain puzzles, or even playing video games with your mates.

C is for causes. 150 years after MS was first discovered, its cause is still a bit of a mystery! But scientists reckon it might be a combo of a few things (lack of sunlight, genes, germs, smoking). Hey, maybe you'll be the future Nobel Prize winner who finds the answer!

D is for diagnosis. Have you seen one of these big machines before? It's called an MRI scanner and takes a picture of your brain, which is one of the ways that doctors look for signs of MS. There are a bunch of other tests that doctors can do too.

E is for emotions. When you're diagnosed with MS you might feel angry, you might want to have a good old cry, you may feel scared about the future, or you may feel relieved that you finally know why you're experiencing lots of weird things. Whatever you feel, it's OK. There's no right or wrong way to react, but just try not to bottle all your emotions up inside.

F is for fatigue. We all have days when we feel pretty knackered, when all you want to do is lie on the sofa in your PJs. But when you have MS, that 'knackered' feeling is sometimes taken to a whole new level, and this symptom is called fatigue. Sometimes people compare it to walking through a deep, muddy river in heavy, wet clothes carrying shopping bags full of rocks.

G is for genes, no not those kind of genes, but the genes that live inside you and make us who we are. Scientists think our genes may play some part in why we get MS. But there are lots of other factors too, so if someone in your family has MS, it definitely doesn't mean you'll automatically get it as well.

H is for history. It was way back in the 19th century, when Queen Victoria was on the throne and the word selfie was definitely not in the dictionary, that MS was first recognised as a condition. Back then it was diagnosed using the hot bath test... basically you sit in warm water and if it caused your

symptoms to get worse, it was sign you had MS. Thankfully, medicine has moved on since then!

I is for information, and lots of it. Google 'MS' and you'll find pages and pages of information about it. It's good to stay informed, but you should make sure it's information you can trust, otherwise things could get really confusing. The MS Trust website is definitely a good place to start.

J is for don't JUDGE. Lots of MS symptoms are invisible to other people. So a person with MS may look really healthy on the outside, but inside, they are actually feeling pretty rubbish. As the saying goes, don't judge a book by its cover.

K is for kindness. A little bit of kindness can go a long, long way. Sometimes having MS can be a really lonely place, so doing something simple to show you care could really brighten up someone's day.

L is for life expectancy. When you're told you've got a serious condition like MS, you'll probably want to know what the future might hold. We're going to be honest, at the moment, MS is something you'll have to deal with all your life. But research shows it only has a small impact on how long you'll live and most people will live into old age.

M is for medicines. So the bad news is that there's no medicine that can cure MS (yet!) but the good news is that there are lots of medicines that can help. Some medicines are hard-core and take on MS itself. They work inside your brain to slow down the damage and stop your symptoms flaring up as much – pretty awesome really! Other medicines are really good at getting rid of those annoying symptoms caused by MS, like when your vision goes all blurry or you get those weird sensations in your arms and legs.

N is for making sure that no one is left to manage their MS alone. Let's be honest, having a condition like MS can be really tough at times and it can make you feel a bit lonely. That's where the MS Trust comes in! They provide lots of information about MS (like this handy video!) and teach the MS nurses that support you at the hospital.

O is for taking ownership of your MS. This means looking at the little things you could do yourself that might help you manage MS a bit better, like monitoring your own symptoms by keeping a diary, learning more about MS or trying to be healthier by swapping those naughty snacks for some fruit and veg. Why not take control and show MS who's boss?

P is for pins and needles. Do you ever get that strange, and sometimes painful, tingly feeling in your hands or feet like when you've been sitting with your legs crossed for too long? Well that's caused by MS and it happens when the messages being sent to and from your brain get a bit mixed up.

Q is for questions. A diagnosis of MS can leave your head bursting with questions. So ask them! Quiz your neurologist (the brain doctor) and your MS nurse, or chat with someone at the MS Trust – their enquiry service knows heaps about MS. Remember, knowledge is power!

R is for relapse. A relapse is when you suddenly get some new symptoms or your old ones get worse. This can be pretty scary and it's important to let your MS team know about them ASAP! It's hard to know how long this will last, but it's usually a few weeks. Some pesky symptoms linger. Annoying!

S is for symptoms. You know what we said before about how the immune system goes into overdrive and starts attacking the healthy parts of your body, like the nerves in your brain? Well this damage causes symptoms. Blurry eyesight, strange feelings on the skin, foggy thinking and extreme sleepiness are all pretty common... and pretty annoying.

T is for types of MS. There are a few different types but the one most people have is called relapsing remitting MS. This one can feel a bit like a rollercoaster ride because you go through stages where your symptoms are particularly bad (called relapses) and then you have better times in between where your symptoms improve or even disappear completely. See what I mean about the rollercoaster?

U is for understanding. Understanding MS can be difficult, both for the person who has it and for people around them. Some people will be happy to talk about their MS. Others will find it difficult. The best thing you can do is try to be understanding if someone is struggling.

V is for Vision. Eye problems like blind spots, seeing double and jumpy vision can be common in MS. They are often the first thing people notice before getting diagnosed and usually go away over time.

W is for will I end up in a wheelchair? For most people, no. But for some people, the answer is yes, and if you are one of those people, remember a wheelchair allows you to get on with your life and still do the things you love.

X is for eXercise. Yes we know it doesn't start with an X. But hey, it's scientifically proven to help people with MS, don't you know?! There is no right or wrong way to keep fit, just do something you like. But remember to listen to your body and don't overdo it as sometimes you might need a bit longer to recover.

Y is for You. Sometimes you might think that MS will change everything, and it will probably impact on your life. People might want to treat you differently, but remember that YOU are still YOU.

Z is for Zzzzzz. Sleep problems are common in MS, so getting a good night's kip can be difficult. Try to cut out coffee, fizzy drinks and chocolate close to bedtime. Make sure you have plenty of chill time in the evening to wind down. Oh and this is a bit of a boring one, but try to keep the bedroom for sleeping and not watching TV or using your mobile or tablet.