

## About Us

Multiple Sclerosis New Zealand (MSNZ) is a non-profit organisation, established in 1967. We are striving towards our vision of being the national leader for service excellence for people impacted by multiple sclerosis (MS). To achieve this, we are on a mission to coordinate and lead the advances in best-practice MS care, national leadership, advocacy, information, education and awareness.

We promote internationally recognised MS Brain Health principles and recommendations for living well with MS. We encourage resiliency, self-management, and preventative services.

Positive attitudes and lifestyle modifications, which we encourage, can have a profound effect on symptom management and maximising opportunities for long-term health and brain health outcomes.

To access our evidence-based information head to our website or reach out to us.



[www.msnz.org.nz](http://www.msnz.org.nz)



0800 MS LINE  
0800 67 5463



[info@msnz.org.nz](mailto:info@msnz.org.nz)

## Regional MS Societies

18 regional societies nationwide provide access to professional and specialised services in your local community.

Their community advisor can provide one-on-one support and information to you, your family and your whānau on various MS-related issues including symptom management and treatment options, referrals, and other support services available in your area.



## Contact your local society

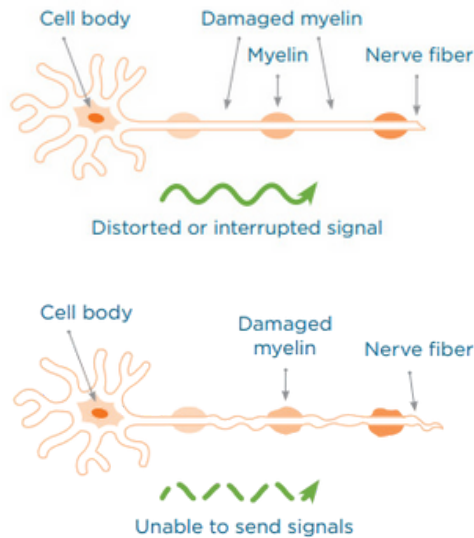
- Northland - 09 438 3945
- Auckland & North Shore - 09 845 5921
- Waikato - 07 834 4740
- Bay of Plenty - 022 638 7015
- Rotorua - 022 314 0212
- Gisborne - 06 868 8842
- Hawkes Bay - 06 835 8542
- Taranaki - 021 985 285
- Wanganui - 06 345 2336
- Manawatū - 022 687 2033
- Wellington - 04 388 8127
- Marlborough - 03 578 4058
- Nelson - 021 264 7559
- West Coast - 03 768 7007
- Canterbury - 03 366 2857
- South Canterbury - 03 687 7375
- Otago - 03 455 5894
- Southland - 03 218 3975

# What is Multiple Sclerosis



## What is MS?

Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a common central nervous system disease where the fibres covered by a protective myelin sheath develops scarring, known as sclerosis. This scarring distorts or prevents the smooth flow of messages from the brain and spinal cord throughout the body.



The disruptions in messages travelling through the nervous system cause a spectrum of symptoms for those with MS. While not everyone will experience all symptoms, the following are commonly observed in various combinations and degrees of severity:

- Loss of balance or coordination;
- Tremor and weakness;
- Blurred or double vision;
- Eye pain (typically affecting one eye);
- Difficulty with movements of the legs, arms and hands;
- Changes with bladder or bowel functions;
- Numbness and pain;
- Cognitive difficulties and memory issues;
- Sexual problems;
- Fatigue.

## What causes MS?

Currently, the cause of MS remains unknown. Nonetheless, research indicates that it is probably due the following factors:

- A response to a virus, potentially occurring years after infection;
- Exposure to an unknown environmental agent before puberty;
- An autoimmune reaction in which the body attacks its own tissue; or
- Genetic predisposition to the above triggers.



## How is MS managed?

There are numerous effective strategies to manage and alleviate the symptoms of MS.

New Zealand provides many MS-specific funded treatments that directly target the immune system, though eligibility criteria do apply. Patients, in consultation with their neurologist, can decide on the most suitable treatment, and work closely with their GP or neurology team for day-to-day symptom management.

This comprehensive approach involves a combination of medication, physiotherapy, maintaining a nutritious diet, ensuring adequate rest, and incorporating moderate exercise - all essential elements in living well with multiple sclerosis.

## Who gets MS?

Approximately 1 in every 1,000 New Zealanders has MS. It is more prevalent in:

- **Women:** In NZ there are approximately 3 women with MS for every man.
- **Young adults:** The average age of diagnosis in NZ is 38, with symptoms typically emerging between the ages of 20 and 50.
- **Cooler climates:** Generally, MS is more common the farther people live from the equator. NZ has a higher prevalence in the South than the North.
- **Caucasians:** MS is more prevalent in Caucasians compared to other racial groups. Although the prevalence among Māori and Polynesians is currently low, the incidence is increasing.
- **Close relatives of people with MS.** While MS itself is not inherited, there is potential to inherit a susceptibility to the condition. About 10% of people with MS also have a close relative with MS.



## Who can help?

Positive attitudes and lifestyle modifications can have a profound effect on symptom management and maximising opportunities for long-term health and brain health outcomes.

Contact your local regional society today to see how they can help you to independently live your best life, with multiple sclerosis.