

About the progressive spectrum of MS

Media factsheet

Understanding SPMS

Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a chronic disorder of the central nervous system (CNS) that disrupts the normal functioning of the brain, optic nerves and spinal cord through inflammation and tissue loss¹. MS, which affects approximately 2.3 million people worldwide², is often characterized into three forms: relapsing remitting MS (RRMS), secondary progressive MS (SPMS) and primary progressive MS (PPMS)³.

Many patients can transition from the earlier stage RRMS to SPMS over time⁴⁻⁶. SPMS, as a phase on the progressive spectrum, is often characterized by cognitive and physical changes over time, in presence or absence of relapses, leading to a progressive accumulation of neurological disability⁷. Approximately 85% of patients initially present with relapsing forms of MS². While MS progression is different for each patient and influenced by multiple factors (including use of MS disease-modifying treatments), it is estimated that up to 80% of RRMS patients will eventually transition to SPMS²:

On treatment	Not on treatment
25% in 10 years ⁸	50% in 10 years ⁵
50% in 20 years ⁸	90% in 25 years ⁵

Changes indicating a transition to SPMS

Every person with MS experiences it differently and the path it follows can be different, too. Following an initial period of RRMS, symptoms can gradually worsen over time, with or without evidence of disease activity (with relapses and/or evidence of new MRI activity in the CNS), which can be difficult to notice⁷. Cognitive changes can happen earlier than physical ones and therefore can be an early indicator of progression⁹. Things to look out for:

- Relapsing less often¹⁰
- Symptoms that are worsening, new or lingering between relapses^{10,11}
- Remembering things or concentrating become harder^{10,12}
- Decreasing number of active lesions on MRI scans¹³
- Physical activities such as walking the dog or visiting family become harder¹⁰
- Bladder dysfunction¹⁴
- A need for enhanced walking aids and wheelchairs¹⁴

Importance of early diagnosis

As a result of these physical and cognitive changes, this phase of the progressive MS spectrum can substantially impact the lives of people living with MS and those around them¹⁰. To get ahead of progression, early diagnosis and treatment are critical for individuals with MS and can help maintain stability for longer.

It is important for people living with MS to learn how to identify and tackle the physical and cognitive changes. Caregivers can play an integral role in the daily management of SPMS and initiation of treatment, as appropriate, and recognizing these changes in symptoms.

Any change – no matter how small – should trigger a discussion with a doctor, as an early professional diagnosis of SPMS and initiation of treatment, as appropriate, means being able to keep people living with MS where they are now for longer.

References



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