



MS 101: A Multiple Sclerosis Glossary

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Talk to anyone newly diagnosed with MS or their loved ones, and you'll likely hear how overwhelmed they feel when trying to research and assimilate all the new MS terminology. Patients and caregivers often get flustered with the lingo that comes with therapy appointments, treatment details and follow-up visits.

To help get everyone up to speed, we've created a glossary of MS terms.

Annualized Relapse Rate (ARR): The average annual number of multiple sclerosis (MS) relapses.

Assistive devices: Any tools that are designed, fabricated and/or adapted to assist a person in performing a particular task, e.g., cane, walker, shower chair.

Ataxia: The incoordination and unsteadiness that result from the brain's failure to regulate the body's posture and the strength and direction of limb movements.

Autoimmune disease: A process in which the body's immune system causes illness by mistakenly attacking healthy cells, organs, or tissues in the body that are essential for good health. Multiple sclerosis is believed to be an autoimmune disease.

Axon: The long, threadlike part of a nerve cell (neuron) along which nerve signals are conducted. In MS, the protective coating (myelin) that protects the axon is attacked.

Central Nervous System (CNS): The part of the nervous system that includes the brain, optic nerves, and spinal cord.

Clinically Isolated Syndrome (CIS): A first neurologic event that lasts at least 24 hours that suggests demyelination, accompanied by multiple, clinically "silent" (asymptomatic) lesions on MRI that are typical of MS.

Cognitive impairment: Changes in cognitive function caused by trauma or disease, most commonly affecting memory, information processing, and executive functions in MS.

Demyelination: A loss of myelin in the white matter of the central nervous system (brain, spinal cord).

Foot drop: A condition of weakness in the muscles of the foot and ankle which interferes with a person's ability to flex the ankle and walk with a normal heel-toe pattern.

Lesion: An area of inflamed or demyelinated central nervous system tissue. A lesion or "plaque" can vary from a few millimeters to a few centimeters in diameter.

Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI): A diagnostic procedure that uses a high frequency electromagnetic impulse to produce visual images of different body parts without the use of X-rays. An important diagnostic tool in MS, MRI makes it possible to visualize and count lesions in the white matter of the brain and spinal cord.

Myelin: A soft, white coating of nerve fibers in the central nervous system, composed of lipids (fats) and protein. Myelin serves as insulation and as an aid to efficient nerve fiber conduction.

Neurologist: Physician who specializes in the diagnosis and treatment of conditions related to the nervous system.





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Neuron: The basic nerve cell of the nervous system. A neuron consists of a nucleus within a cell body and one or more processes (extensions) called dendrites and axons.

Optic Neuritis: Inflammation or demyelination of the optic (visual) nerve with transient or permanent impairment of vision and occasionally pain.

Primary-Progressive Multiple Sclerosis (PPMS):

A clinical course of MS characterized from the beginning by progressive disease, with no plateaus or remissions, or an occasional plateau and very short-lived, minor improvements.

Relapse: The appearance of new symptoms or the aggravation of old ones, lasting at least twenty-four hours (synonymous with attack, exacerbation, flare-up or worsening).

Relapsing Remitting Multiple Sclerosis (RRMS): A clinical course of MS that is characterized by clearly defined, acute attacks with full or partial recovery (remissions) and no disease progression between attacks.

Sclerosis: Hardening of tissue. In MS, sclerosis is the body's replacement of lost myelin around CNS nerve cells with scar tissue.

Secondary-Progressive Multiple Sclerosis: A clinical course of MS that initially is relapsing-remitting and then becomes progressive at a variable rate, possibly with an occasional relapse and minor remission.

Spasticity: Abnormal increase in muscle tone, manifested as a spring-like resistance to moving or being moved. Also refers to feelings of stiffness and a wide range of involuntary muscle spasms; can occur in any limb, but it is much more common in the legs.

T-cell: A lymphocyte (white blood cell) that develops in the bone marrow, matures in the thymus, and works as part of the immune system in the body.

For more MS terms, visit the [National MS Society](#).

While we hope this information is helpful, please remember this blog is for general informational purposes only. We encourage you to have conversations with a healthcare provider about any specific healthcare questions.

