Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a chronic disease that attacks the central nervous system (the brain, spinal cord and optic nerves). The progress, severity and specific symptoms of MS cannot be predicted. MS is a lifelong disease for which a cause and cure are yet to be found; however, doctors and scientists are making discoveries about the treatment and management of MS every day.

General facts about MS

- Statistics show that 1 in 20 Australians will be touched by MS through a family member, colleague or friend who is living with the disease.
- It is estimated that over 23,000 people in Australia have MS.¹
- An additional 1,000 Australians are diagnosed with MS every year, equating to approximately four people every working day.³
- 2.5 million people are living with MS worldwide.⁴
- MS is the most common disease of the central nervous system in young adults.⁴
- Diagnosis of MS is typically between 20 and 40 years of age, although onset of symptoms may be earlier.³
- Females are more likely to report having MS than males, with an estimated three quarters of all people with the condition being female.¹

Common symptoms of MS

No two cases of MS are identical. The visible and hidden symptoms of MS are unpredictable and vary from person to person and from time to time in the same person.

Common symptoms include:

- extreme tiredness (unusual fatigue)
- visual disturbance, such as blurred or double vision
- difficulties with walking, balance or coordination
- altered muscle tone, such as muscle weakness, tremor, stiffness or spasms
- dizziness and vertigo
- altered sensation, such as tingling, numbness or pins and needles
- sensitivity to heat and/or cold
- pain
- bladder and bowel changes
- emotional and mood changes
- sexual changes
- changes in memory, concentration or reasoning
- slurring or slowing of speech.
The economic and personal cost of MS

- MS is estimated to cost Australia over $1 billion each year.²
- Loss of productivity because of MS costs $494 million per year.²
- Australians with MS spend $78 million per year in out of pocket health care expenses.²
- The care provided by family and other informal carers to Australians with MS would cost $145 million per year to replace.²
- Of the people with MS, 15,800 (6.7%) needed assistance with at least one of the ten everyday activities considered in the 2009 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC). Notably, 46% of people with MS needed assistance with mobility tasks.
- 50–80% of people with MS cease to work full-time within 10 years of diagnosis.⁵
- Of the 20,400 people with MS aged 15–64 years, an estimated 9,800 were employed, with 5,900 of those people being employed part-time.¹
- People with MS have a 30% higher representation in part-time employment, compared to the average Australian.⁵
- In 2005, 52% of people with MS had an annual income below $26,000, or less than $500 per week.⁷
- People with MS are less likely to be in paid employment compared to those with other chronic diseases.⁸

References


For information about MS visit www.ms.org.au