

## Easily misdiagnosed, MS occurs more often in women

### An unpredictable disease attacks the central nervous system

Multiple sclerosis (MS) is an often disabling and unpredictable autoimmune disease of the central nervous system (CNS) that hinders the flow of information inside the brain and between the brain and the nerves of the body.<sup>1</sup>

Most diagnoses of MS occur in people between the ages of 20 and 50, with women being diagnosed with the disease two to three times more often than men.

MS is a common illness that affects many people in different ways, varying in its severity and course. It's caused by white blood cells attacking small parts of the CNS, **according to Dennis N. Bourdette, MD, a neurologist who serves as one of Best Doctors clinical experts on the condition.** Basically, your immune system misrecognizes the important parts of your body as bad, and it starts hurting them.

Some symptoms caused by MS include:

- Impaired walking or weakness/numbness in arms and legs
- Double vision and loss of vision
- Memory issues and lack of concentration
- Paralysis

The cause of MS is still unexplained, but scientists believe the disease may be provoked by an unknown environmental factor in people whose genes are predisposed to react. Due to the lack of information on the cause of MS, it often increases the risk of misdiagnosis.

Doctors also don't know why MS occurs more often in women. Dr. Bourdette notes that nearly all autoimmune diseases, like rheumatoid arthritis, autoimmune thyroid disease, and ulcerative colitis occur more commonly in women than men.

“ This may reflect differences in the hormone status of women and men, with estrogens and progesterone being 'permissive' and testosterone being 'protective.' ”  
Dr. Bourdette says.

Because there is no known cure for the disease, the best way people can prevent MS is to maintain a normal vitamin D level, avoid smoking, eat a healthy diet, exercise, keep a healthy weight, and learn how to control stress.

If you have been diagnosed with MS or are experiencing any related symptoms, your Best Doctors benefit can help. Our experts perform an in-depth review of your existing diagnosis and either confirm it or recommend a change. Get the peace of mind you deserve from experts who care.

<sup>1</sup><https://www.nationalmssociety.org/What-is-MS/Who-Gets-MS>

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