

MS and Comorbidities

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Learning Objectives

- Be able to list at least three comorbid health conditions that commonly affect people with MS
- Be able to describe the impact of comorbid health conditions on disease progression and lifespan
- Be able to describe management strategies to reduce co-morbid health conditions and their impact

MS Facts: What We Talk About

- More than 1 million people in the US have Multiple Sclerosis
- About 3-4 women to 1 man have MS
- Relapsing MS is the most common form
 - Other forms are primary progressive, secondary progressive
- There are many disease modifying therapies for relapsing forms of MS
- Relapse and symptom management are important
 - Treatments include medications, rehabilitation, and lifestyle changes
- MS Care takes a team of personal support and health care providers

MS Facts: What You May Not Know

- You CAN acquire medical conditions other than MS
- These medical conditions can significantly affect
 - The disease course of MS
 - Your MS symptoms
- Management of these other conditions is as important as MS management
- Many things that we recommend for other medical conditions are also recommended in MS management



**Common Things
are Common**

Common Comorbidities

In MS

- Mental Health Conditions (depression, anxiety)
- Diabetes **V**
- Hypertension **V**
- Hyperlipidemia **V**
- Chronic Lung Disease
- Overweight, Obesity
- Ischemic Heart Disease **V**

In General US Population

- Heart Disease
- Cancer
- Chronic Lung Disease
- Stroke
- Alzheimer's Disease
- Diabetes
- Chronic Kidney Disease
- Mental Health Conditions (depression, substance use, alcohol use)

**One Vascular Comorbidity
Increases the Risk of Reaching an
EDSS of 6 by 6 years**

**Two speeds up disability
progression by 200%**

Are There Other Impacts?

- Depression, Diabetes and Ischemic Heart Disease are associated with increased risk of death (similar to general population)
- Any comorbidity is associated with a twice higher risk of non-MS related hospitalization
- Obesity at age 18 has been associated with a two-fold increase in MS risk
- Comorbidities could delay recognition or diagnosis of MS because symptoms are related to other problems
- Financial impact of increased health care system access

Risk Factors for Comorbidities in MS

- Influence of diagnosis of chronic condition
 - Isolation, fear of unknown
 - Role changes
 - Loss of sense of independence
- Avoidance of health care system
- Decrease in physical activity
- Medication side effects
 - Long-term or frequent use of high dose steroids
 - Long-term side effects of antidepressants, anti-seizure medications used to treat MS symptoms

What Can I Do to Prevent and/or Manage Comorbidities?

- Don't avoid yearly wellness checks
 - Trust me. You will end up with MORE doctors. You are already sick of going to the doctor.
- Make wellness a priority = making yourself and your future a priority
- Make lifestyle changes. Most are cheaper than medications!
- Make SMART goals
- Take medications and keep follow up appointments as directed

A LOT of research supports the use of lifestyle changes in the prevention and management of comorbidities common in MS

Research regarding lifestyle changes and their effects on MS is in the adolescent phase (there is some, but people argue about it and aren't sure what to do)

Lifestyle Changes

- Addressing them has a positive impact on vascular risk and comorbidities
- Studies in MS tells us that addressing these areas can have a positive impact on MS symptoms, and perhaps on the course of the disease
 - High blood pressure worsens white matter changes in the brain of people living with MS
- It is all connected
 - Better sleep = better mood
 - Healthier food = better mood
 - Exercise = better sleep
 - Better mood = better choices

Food

- Eat a plant-based diet that is rich in variety and nutrients, high in omega 3 fatty acids and whole grains, and low in processed foods
 - Mediterranean and MIND diets share the most data for benefits in MS and vascular comorbidities
- If an item has more than 5 ingredients, or ingredients you can't pronounce, don't buy it
- Eat colorfully. Vary your fruits and veggies.

There is not one “MS Diet”. The right one is the one that you will follow.

Don't feel like you are missing out because you aren't doing the same thing as your friend living with MS if you are eating healthfully

Movement

- To be healthy, 150 minutes of moderate aerobic exercise is recommended per week + strength training twice weekly
- Exercise may be different depending on how movement has changed for you, and that's ok!
- Move your body at your best time of day
- Use cooling equipment
- Stay hydrated

Ask your provider for a referral to a physical therapist to help you create a safe and effective exercise program

Sleep

- Make sleep a priority, you can always catch up on a show
- Create a calming bedtime ritual to get your body ready for sleep
 - Gratitude journal, yoga or stretching, meditation, diffuse essential oil, herbal teas
- If you read on a device before bed, consider using a blue light blocking filter or glasses
- Avoid late dinner, processed sugar, alcohol, caffeine within a few hours of bedtime

Evaluate your sleep. Do you have a hard time falling or staying asleep? Do you snore?

If so, talk to your provider about an appointment with a sleep specialist

Stress Management

- Eliminate obvious stressors
 - Example: Limit news watching or social media browsing
- Learn to say no to what is not on your priority list
- Start a daily mindfulness practice
 - Meditation, breathing, yoga
- Use the arts to manage stress
- Connect with others
- Get outside

Depression and anxiety are common

Talk to your health care provider about talk therapy and/or medication, as well as specific lifestyle changes for help if you have been experiencing symptoms for most days out of the past 2 weeks

Let's Set a SMART Goal



Specific



Measurable



Achievable



Realistic



Timely

SMART Goal Example

- Specific
 - "I will go a week without soda"
 - NOT: "I am never drinking soda again"
- Measurable: Yes! I don't have soda in the house.
- Achievable: Yes! I can do this.
- Realistic: Yes! It will actually save me money!
- Timely: Yes! I recently learned my blood sugar was borderline high. It's a good time to set a health goal.



**Focus on what
you *CAN DO***

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