

Physicians Who Care for People with MS

Neurologists: Specialize in the diagnosis and treatment of conditions related to the nervous system including the brain, spinal cord, and nerves. Many neurologists have additional subspecialty training after completing their residency in one area of neurology such as MS, epilepsy, or sleep disorders.

Family Practitioners: Include family practice, internal medicine, and doctors of osteopathy. Provide primary care for both acute (short-term) and chronic (long-term) illnesses, with particular skills in treating people with multiple health issues.

Physiatrists: Rehabilitation physicians with nerve, muscle, and bone expertise who treat injuries or illnesses that affect how you move. Provide nonsurgical treatments to decrease pain and enhance function.

Urologists: Specialize in the diagnosis and treatment of urinary problems in men and women and in the diagnosis and treatment of problems related to the male sexual organs.

Ophthalmologists: Specialize in diseases and surgery of the visual pathways, including the eye, brain, and areas surrounding the eye.



Questions to ask:

- How much of your practice is devoted to MS?
- Are you affiliated with an MS Care Center?
- If I am feeling symptoms, when should I let you know?
- Once a baseline MRI is taken, what is the follow-up plan?
- Can I communicate with you or your office via e-mail?
- Can I have my own copies of my MRI films?
- How do you usually decide on a specific therapy with a patient?
- How do you feel about complementary or alternative therapies for MS?

Please add your own questions here:

Rehabilitation Specialists Who Help People with MS

The goal of rehabilitation is to improve and maintain function. From the time of diagnosis onward, rehab specialists provide education and treatment designed to promote good health and general conditioning, reduce fatigue, and help you feel and function at your best—at home and at work.

Types of Rehabilitation Specialists

Physical Therapists (PT): Evaluate and address the body's ability to move and function, with particular emphasis on walking, strength, balance, posture, fatigue, and pain.

Occupational Therapists (OT): Provide training in energy conservation techniques and the use of adaptive tools and devices to simplify tasks at home and work.

Speech/language Pathologists (SLP):

Evaluate and treat problems with speech and/or swallowing—both of which can result from damage in the central nervous system due to MS.

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors:

Offer job readiness training, job coaching, job placement assistance, mobility training, and assistive technology assessments. Help people maintain their current employment or find new employment that accommodates their needs.

Registered Dietitians (RD):

Provide nutritional counseling through diet management to promote good nutrition. Develop individual care plans for each person with MS to promote a good nutritional status.



Questions to ask:

- How much experience with MS do you have?
- Are you affiliated with an MS Care Center?
- Do you commonly treat my condition?
- How can your services help me?
- What do you expect from me?
- How often must I come to get results?
- How long does each session last?
- Can I communicate with you or your office via e-mail?

Please add your own questions here:

Clinical Specialists Who Care for People with MS

The primary goal of these professionals is to help people with MS learn effective self care to manage minor problems before they become major ones.

Advanced Practice Nurses (APNs):

Include clinical nurse specialists, nurse practitioners, and registered nurses with additional education (certification or master's degree) and expertise in a specialty area or clinical practice, such as MS. APNs can prescribe medications and order laboratory tests working with a collaborating physician.

Registered Nurses (RNs): Licensed nursing professionals who may work in MS centers, private practices, hospitals, long-term care facilities, home care agencies, or for pharmaceutical companies. Nurses are competent experts who can assess your needs and develop and implement a plan of care to address your concerns and sustain your health and wellness.

Physicians Assistants (PAs): Licensed to practice medicine with physician supervision. PAs perform examinations and procedures, order treatments, diagnose illnesses, prescribe medication, and order and interpret diagnostic tests.

Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs):

Technical nurses who mainly work in hospitals or physicians' offices and provide care under the direct supervision of a physician or an RN or APN.

For people with MS, nurses and PAs perform a wide variety of services, including:

- Ongoing symptom management
- General wellness counseling
- Patient and family education
- Medication management
- Bowel, bladder management
- Outpatient care with home-care services



Questions to ask:

- How much of your practice involves patients with MS?
- What kind of training do you have?
- If I am experiencing symptoms, can I call you directly?
- Do you work with anyone receiving alternative therapy for MS?
- Are you affiliated with an MS Care Center?
- Can I communicate with you or your office via e-mail?

Please add your own questions here:

Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) Practitioners

Today it is estimated that about 75% of people with MS use CAM along with their regular modifying treatment. Complementary medical approaches are nontraditional methods used along with conventional Western medical treatment (eg, acupuncture to relieve nausea). Alternative approaches are used instead of other treatments (eg, practicing yoga to relieve spasticity (stiffness) rather than taking medication).

The following is just a small sample of CAM practitioners who may have experience with MS. Interview several before making your decision.

Examples of CAM Practitioners

Acupuncturists practice traditional Chinese medicine, one of the oldest forms of medicine in the world. They can help maintain a patient's health by placing tiny

needles under the skin on specific points on the body.

Ayurveda Practitioners practice this ancient approach, balancing the body, the mind, and the spirit. They use a combination of herbs, massage, and diets to achieve physical and mental wellness.

Chiropractors diagnose and treat problems of the musculoskeletal system through its effects on the nervous system and on general health. They manipulate the spine, joints, and soft tissue to help alleviate pain and promote optimal health.

Herbalists use extracts of plants to treat illnesses. A qualified medical herbalist could help people with MS by finding herbs that can support the immune system, strengthen the nervous system, and ease inflammation.



Questions to ask:

- What kind of training do you have? Degrees? Certification?
- Do you have experience treating people with MS?
- How many people with MS do you care for? What kinds of treatments have you provided for them, and what are the results?
- Do you believe this therapy can effectively address my complaint? Is there any scientific research supporting the treatment's use in people with MS?
- Is there a brochure or Web site to tell me more about the practice?
- How much do treatments cost? Do you accept my kind of insurance or participate in my insurer's network?
- If I'm experiencing adverse events, can I call you directly?

Please add your own questions here:

Psychosocial Specialists Who Care for People with MS

MS causes stress and complications in life that go beyond the usual stress that most adults face. A counselor helps you understand your feelings and reactions, learn ways to deal with bad feelings, and problem-solve areas of your life that are causing concern.

Examples of Psychosocial Specialists

Psychiatrists are medical doctors (MDs) who specialize in mental health and can prescribe medications. Most psychiatrists focus on prescribing the appropriate medication for each patient; a few also do psychotherapy.

Neuropsychologists specialize in memory, problem solving, and can also diagnose MS. They may also

offer cognitive rehabilitation exercises to improve memory, attention, and information processing and reasoning.

Psychologists (or psychotherapists) have doctoral degrees (such as a PhD or PsyD). They help people with MS cope with cognitive, emotional, and interpersonal issues. They provide individual counseling sessions to reduce emotional distress and improve stress management skills.

Social workers have an MSW (master of social work) or an LCSW (licensed clinical social worker) degree and in most states are covered by health insurance. Social workers offer counseling on emotional issues, financial resources, and other quality of life issues.



Questions to ask:

- How long have you been in practice?
- What are your areas of expertise?
- Do you have specific experience working with people who have MS?
- What level of education do you have?
- Are you licensed by the state?
- Do you have experience performing individual, couples, or family therapy?
- How much do you charge per session?

Please add your own questions here:

You and Those Who Care About You

Many people are not prepared to deal with the changes in routine and lifestyle that MS may require. You are going to need to build a strong support system around you...because no one can handle life, let alone life with MS, all alone.

The following are some examples of ways to rally your troops and surround yourself with those who care:

- Ask for help from family and friends
 - Clearly identify your strengths and needs and communicate them to others
 - Acknowledge and admit to loved ones that you are dealing with a major issue, but do not dwell on it
 - Clarify your problems, fears, and challenges with MS, then ask your loved ones if they can help you with them
 - Consider support groups and classes; you may find it comforting to be with others who really understand the personal experience of what a diagnosis of MS can mean
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Tips for Keeping Family and Friends Close

- Be as open and honest as you can from day one
- Try to show an understanding of the feelings your family or friends may be having about your MS
- Have a family meeting to share your feelings about having MS
- Accept offers of help from others
- Be clear about what you do and what you do not want others to do for you
- Foster a supportive family and friends network by remaining positive and motivated, while reaching out in a clear and organized manner

Please add your own tips here:
