

## YOUR LOCAL MS SOCIETY

You can contact an MS Society near you.

There are 19 offices nationwide, enabling you to access professional and specialised services in your own community.

In particular, our regional offices can put you in touch with a local Field Worker, who can provide one-on-one support and information to you and your family.

Field Workers give advice on a wide range of matters concerning MS and arrange social groups, exercise classes, support meetings and service referrals.

## REGIONAL MS SOCIETIES

Northland	09 438 3945	Manawatu	06 357 3188
North Shore	09 443 1153	Wellington	04 388 8127
Auckland	09 845 5921		
Waikato	07 834 4740	Marlborough	03 578 4058
Bay of Plenty	07 571 5030	Nelson	03 544 6386
Rotorua	07 346 1830	West Coast	03 768 7007
Gisborne	06 868 8842	Canterbury	03 366 2857
Hawkes Bay	06 843 5002	Sth Canterbury	03 684 7834
Taranaki	06 751 2330	Otago	03 455 5894
Wanganui	06 345 2336	Southland	03 218 3975

## GETTING MORE INFORMATION

The Multiple Sclerosis Society of New Zealand is a non-profit organisation that provides support, education and advocacy for people with MS and their support networks.

The Society provides a range of resources about MS, including a website, booklets on particular symptoms and treatments, a quarterly magazine, a lending library and a weekly emails updating MS research as well as MS news & events.

You can access all of these and various other resources on MS from our website at [www.msnz.org.nz](http://www.msnz.org.nz) or contact us as follows:

MS Society of New Zealand Inc.  
Level 2, 85 The Terrace  
PO Box 2627  
Wellington 6140

Phone: 04 499 4677  
Fax: 04 499 4675  
Email: [info@msnz.org.nz](mailto:info@msnz.org.nz)  
Website: [www.msnz.org.nz](http://www.msnz.org.nz)



© Multiple Sclerosis Society of NZ Inc 2007

ISBN: 978-0-908982-10-3



# THE FACTS ABOUT MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

## WHAT IS MS?

Multiple Sclerosis (MS) is one of the most common diseases of the central nervous system.

A fatty substance called the myelin sheath covers the fibres of the nervous system. The myelin protects the nerves and helps messages move between the brain and the rest of the body.

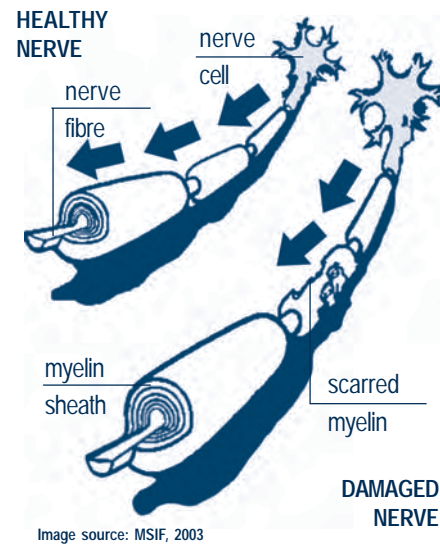
In MS, the myelin sheath covering the nerves in the brain and spinal cord becomes scarred in scattered patches. This is multiple scarring, or sclerosis. Essentially, this distorts or prevents the flow of messages from the brain and spinal cord to other parts of the body.

The distortions to the messages traveling through the nervous system cause a range of problems for people with multiple sclerosis.

Although it is important to note that there is no typical set of MS symptoms, the following are common (in varying combinations and severities):

- loss of balance or co-ordination;
- tremor and weakness;
- blurred or double vision;
- eye pain (usually only affecting one eye);
- difficulty with legs, arms and hand movements;
- bladder or bowel problems;
- numbness and pain;
- problems with thinking and remembering;
- sexual problems; and/or
- fatigue.

*This diagram shows a healthy section of nerve tissue alongside one that has had its myelin damaged by MS.*



## WHAT CAUSES MS?

At this time, the cause of MS is still unknown.

However, research suggests it is likely to be a combination of the following:

- reaction to a virus, possibly years after infection;
- exposure to an unknown environmental agent before puberty;
- an auto-immune reaction in which the body attacks its own tissue for an unknown reason; or
- genetic susceptibility to the above triggers.

## WHO GETS MS?

Approximately 1 New Zealander in every 1,000 has MS. It is more common in:

**Young adults.** People with MS usually experience their first symptoms when they are aged between 20 and 40 years old.

**People in cooler climates.** Generally, MS becomes more common the further south people live.

**Women.** There are approximately 2 women with MS for every man with the condition.

**Caucasians.** MS is much more common in Caucasians than in any other racial group. Incidence among Maori and Polynesians is still low but appears to be increasing.

**Near relatives of those with MS.** MS itself is not inherited, but people may inherit the susceptibility to the disease. About 10% of people with MS also have a near relative with MS. It is NOT contagious.

## HOW IS MS TREATED?

While MS still cannot be cured, much can be done to help manage the condition.

There are MS-specific treatments available. These directly target the immune system. A neurologist determines whether these are relevant for each person.

Generally, the person with MS works with their GP on the day-to-day management of the condition.

Medication, physiotherapy, good nutrition, rest and moderate exercise all have an important role in the management of the condition.