

Scientists spot signs that predict worsening multiple sclerosis

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(HealthDay)—Multiple sclerosis (MS) is more likely to progress to

advanced disease among patients who suffer from fatigue and limited use of their legs, new research suggests.

"Better understanding who is at high risk of getting worse may eventually allow us to tailor more specific treatments to these people," said study author Dr. Bianca Weinstock-Guttman. She is with the University of Buffalo's Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences, in New York.

MS is a disabling disease of the central nervous system that disrupts communication between the brain and the body. Common symptoms include [muscle weakness](#), fatigue, difficulty walking, dizziness and vision problems.

Roughly 80 percent to 85 percent of people with [multiple sclerosis](#) are first diagnosed with relapsing-remitting MS, which includes periods of remission between flare-ups, the researchers explained.

Most MS patients eventually develop the progressive form of the disease. For these people, their symptoms do not come and go. Instead, they gradually and steadily worsen. There are some drugs that can help control relapsing-remitting MS, but there are no treatments for progressive MS, the study authors noted.

For the study, the researchers evaluated 155 people, aged 50 and older, who had been diagnosed with relapsing-remitting multiple sclerosis at least 15 years earlier. All of the patients' symptoms and their levels of disability were assessed when the study began. These evaluations were repeated five years later.

Overall, 30 percent of the participants experienced a worsening of their disease and developed progressive MS after five years. The researchers found these patients were four times as likely to experience fatigue. This

was true even after the researchers considered other possible contributing factors, such as age, time since diagnosis and the severity of their disability.

The [patients](#) who developed progressive MS were also older and were three times as likely to report weakness and spasms in their legs. They also had more severe disabilities at the study's start, the findings showed.

"While more research needs to be done, this study brings us closer to understanding which older adults with MS may be at higher risk of getting worse," Weinstock-Guttman said in an American Academy of Neurology news release.

"With the aging population, this information will be vital as [people](#) with MS, their families and policy makers make decisions about their care," she added.

The findings are to be presented in April at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Neurology, in Boston. Research presented at meetings is considered preliminary until published in a peer-reviewed journal.

More information: The National Multiple Sclerosis Society has more about [multiple sclerosis](#).

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