

## YOUR LOCAL MS SOCIETY

You can contact an MS Society near you.

There are 18 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     | Central Districts 06 357 3188 |
| Auckland 09 845 5921      | Wellington 04 388 8127        |
| Waikato 07 834 4740       | Marlborough 03 578 4058       |
| Bay of Plenty 07 571 6898 | Nelson 03 544 6386            |
| Rotorua 07 346 1830       | West Coast 03 768 7007        |
| Gisborne 06 868 8842      | Canterbury 03 366 2857        |
| Hawkes Bay 06 835 8542    | Sth Canterbury 03 687 7375    |
| 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 booklets on particular symptoms and treatments, a newly-diagnosed modular series updates on progress and information about the condition.

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.**

PO Box 32124, Christchurch 8147

Phone: 0800 MS LINE (67 5463)

Email: [info@msnz.org.nz](mailto:info@msnz.org.nz)

Website: [www.msnz.org.nz](http://www.msnz.org.nz)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/mssnz](http://www.facebook.com/mssnz)

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Multiple Sclerosis  
New Zealand

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## THE FACTS ABOUT MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

## WHAT IS MS?

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

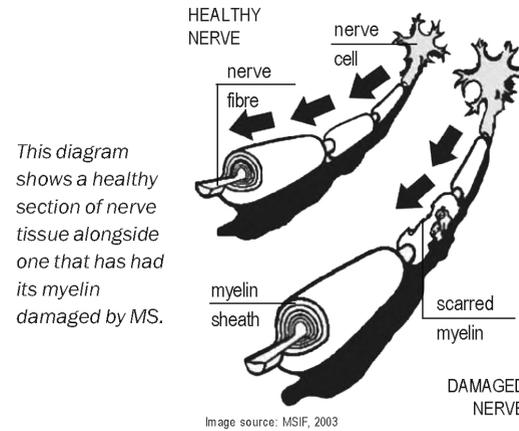
A fatty substance called the myelin sheath covers the fibres of the nervous system. The myelin protects the nerves and helps messages move between the brain and the rest of the body.

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 travelling 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.



## 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 away from the equator people live.

**Women.** In NZ there are approximately 3 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 Polynesian 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.

## 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.