



## National MS Society Information Sourcebook

[www.nationalmssociety.org/sourcebook](http://www.nationalmssociety.org/sourcebook)

### Physical Therapy

The purpose of physical therapy (PT) is to restore or maintain a person's ability when a medical condition or injury causes impairment of movement and reduction in normal activity. The physical therapist is trained to evaluate and improve movement and function of the body, with particular emphasis on physical mobility, strength, balance, posture, fatigue, and pain. The ultimate goal is to achieve and maintain optimal functioning and prevent unnecessary complications such as de-conditioning, disuse weakness, and muscle tightness.

Because most people with MS initially experience a relapsing-remitting disease course, they are likely to have different levels of physical ability at different times. The impact that the MS is having on an individual's central nervous system at any given point in time determines how effective PT can be in enhancing specific functions, and, indeed, what types of physical therapy an individual can do. Even in the earliest stages of the disease, however, there is a role for physical therapy in helping people to manage their energy wisely and maintain optimal levels of physical functioning.

#### **A Written Referral from a Physician is Often Required by Insurance Plans**

A physical therapist with experience in treating people with MS can evaluate and recommend, on an individual basis, those interventions that will produce maximal results. Chapters of the National MS Society can provide referrals to experienced PTs in the community. A physical therapist can also recommend the appropriate ambulatory aid for those experiencing difficulty with walking, balance, and/or endurance. Activities to enhance control and muscle balance can improve function, safety, and efficiency of movement, and prevent or postpone weakness caused by lack of use. Slow stretching can be helpful in managing spasticity and pain, and in maintaining range of motion.

#### **Consider the Effects of Heat and Fatigue During Exercise**

Because heat can make MS symptoms worse in many people, the recommendation is generally to exercise in a cool environment (and consider using cooling garments), and alternate periods of exercise with equal periods of rest. With this type of exercise-rest-exercise pattern, physical therapy may be quite effective, with very good results.

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## See also...

### Sourcebook

- ABLEDATA
- Aquatics/Aquatic Exercise
- Exercise
- Occupational Therapy
- Rehabilitation

### Society Web Resources

- Exacerbations  
[www.nationalmssociety.org/Exacerbation](http://www.nationalmssociety.org/Exacerbation)
- Spotlight: MS and Mobility  
[www.nationalmssociety.org/Mobility](http://www.nationalmssociety.org/Mobility)
- Spotlight: Modifications for Work and Home  
[www.nationalmssociety.org/Modifications](http://www.nationalmssociety.org/Modifications)
- Spotlight: Rehabilitation in MS  
[www.nationalmssociety.org/Rehab](http://www.nationalmssociety.org/Rehab)

### For Healthcare Professionals

- Clinical Bulletin: Occupational Therapy in Multiple Sclerosis Rehabilitation
- Clinical Bulletin: Physical Therapy in Multiple Sclerosis Rehabilitation  
[www.nationalmssociety.org/ClinicalBulletins](http://www.nationalmssociety.org/ClinicalBulletins)
- Expert Opinion Paper: Rehabilitation: Recommendations for Persons with Multiple Sclerosis  
[www.nationalmssociety.org/ExpertOpinionPapers](http://www.nationalmssociety.org/ExpertOpinionPapers)

### Books

Kalb R. (ed.) *Multiple Sclerosis: The Questions You Have; The Answers You Need* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). New York: Demos Medical Publishing, 2004.  
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Schapiro R. *Managing the Symptoms of Multiple Sclerosis* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York: Demos Medical Publishing, 2003.

The National Multiple Sclerosis Society is proud to be a source of information about multiple sclerosis. Our comments are based on professional advice, published experience, and expert opinion, but do not represent individual therapeutic recommendations or prescription. For specific information and advice, consult your personal physician.

To contact your chapter, call **1-800-FIGHT-MS** (1-800-344-4867) or visit the National MS Society web site: [www.nationalmssociety.org](http://www.nationalmssociety.org).