

School Services

School Guide for Students with Multiple Sclerosis



What is Multiple Sclerosis (MS)?

Multiple sclerosis is a chronic, often disabling disease that affects the central nervous system (CNS). The CNS is made up of the brain, spinal cord, and optic nerves. MS damages the protective covering that surrounds nerve cells (myelin sheath). When this nerve covering is damaged, nerve impulses are slowed down or stopped. The nerve damage is caused by inflammation which occurs when the body's own immune cells attack the nervous system. It is not known what triggers the inflammation. The most common theories point to virus, genetic defect, or a combination of both.

How can MS affect School Performance?

Symptoms vary, because the location and severity of each flare up can be different. Episodes can last for days, weeks, or months. These episodes alternate with periods of reduced or no symptoms (remissions) to return of symptoms (relapse). Many of these symptoms are "invisible," vary in intensity, and come and go randomly.

- Extreme fatigue (worse in the afternoon)
- Intense pain
- Painful muscles spasms
- Numbness and tingling in any area
- Double vision, rapid eye movements, vision loss
- Decreased attention span, poor judgment and memory loss
- Difficulty reasoning, solving problems and slow processing
- Depression/Anxiety
- Dizziness
- Hearing loss
- Frequent urination or incontinence
- Constipation or stool leakage

The other symptoms may be "visible":

- Loss of Balance
- Problems with coordination and making small movements
- Problems moving arms and legs (walking)
- Tremor or weakness in one or more arms or legs
- Slurred speech
- Difficulty chewing or swallowing
- Possible seizures

How can schools assist students with MS?

Academic

- Start academic interventions right away under Section 504 or IDEA For Other Health Impairment
- Assess for PT/OT/ST and assistive technology, as soon as possible
- May need assistive devices such as a wheelchair, walker, or wall bars
- Set up homebound school services or intermittent homebound services if the student will be out four or more consecutive weeks
- If the hands are affected, give tests orally; no grades or demerits for handwriting
- Use of a laptop or computer for homework, essays, quizzes, and notes
- Provide a hard copy of the notes prior to class or tape record notes in class
- Provide memory aides (such as organizers or detailed schedule of assignments)
- Have reading assignments on tape or enlarge written material, if student's vision is affected
- Be flexible with homework and/or class work, as work overload can be stressful
- Consider modified days, half-days, alternative classes, when needed
- Place more difficult classes earlier in the day

Social/ Emotional

- Conduct a staff in-service for any staff involved with the student
- Provide counseling to address social and emotional stress
- Select a support person to address the student's concerns that may arise
- Frequent communication among student, parents, school nurse, and medical team

Physical

- Incorporate rest period in student's schedule due to fatigue
- Consider an extra set of text books (one for home and one for school)
- Consider having two lockers (one upstairs and one downstairs)
- When legs are affected, utilize an elevator pass and not the stairs
- Schedule major tests and projects on separate due dates to avoid fatigue
- Student will need breaks in standardized testing to avoid fatigue
- Student may be involved in school activities, but with possible limitations
- Extra travel time between classes
- Preferential seating
- Permanent bathroom pass, if student has bowel or bladder difficulties
- Permanent nurse pass
- A change of clothes in case student becomes soiled
- Avoid fatigue, stress, extreme temperatures, and exposure to illness
- May need adaptive P.E.

Resources

www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/000737.htm

www.mayoclinic.com/health/demilinatingdisease

www.nationalmssociety.org/living-with-multiple-sclerosis

www.wmedicinehealth.com/multiple_sclerosis/page3_em.htm

School Services Department

Children's HealthSM

Dallas Campus: 214-456-7733

Plano Campus: 469-303-4418