



Patients with MS may experience pain at some point in their disease. The specific types and severity of pain vary from person to person and may also change over time. Being able to describe both the kind of pain you are experiencing and its effects on your everyday life is essential for successful treatment. For example, hand tingling may sometimes be a cause of mild discomfort, or it might make holding things difficult or very painful.

Describing pain

When describing pain, use words and phrases such as:

- Aching
- Cold
- Creeping
- Dull
- Hot or burning
- Pressure-like
- Sharp
- Squeezing
- Stabbing
- "Pins and needles"
- "Electric shock"

What causes pain in MS?

Pain in MS may be caused directly by nerve damage, or indirectly due to other MS symptoms. However, it is possible that not all pain you experience is due to MS but instead may be caused by other things such as a side effect of medicines, infection, linked to an accident or trauma, joint problems, etc.

Common types of pain in MS

NEUROPATHIC PAIN

This type of pain is caused by MS-related nerve damage in the brain and spinal cord. It may cause a range of sensations from minor discomfort to intense sharp or burning pain.



MUSCULOSKELETAL PAIN

This type of pain originates in the muscles and joints and may come as a result of living with the stress MS may place on your body. For example, balance problems or muscle weakness may lead to problems with posture that may strain your joints, ligaments or other muscles. Sometimes, stiffness or spasms in your muscles may cause pain.

Treatment

NEUROPATHIC PAIN

Anticonvulsants are some of the most commonly used medications for MS-related neuropathic pain, including carbamazepine, gabapentin, pregabalin, lamotrigine, and phenytoin. Possible side effects include skin rash, dizziness, blurred vision and drowsiness.

Antidepressants are also widely used and can include drugs such as “tricyclic antidepressants” like amitriptyline. These can be useful to treat certain types of pain such as when your skin becomes painfully sensitive to even the slightest touch. Possible side effects may include constipation, dry mouth, and blurred vision.

MUSCULOSKELETAL PAIN

Analgesics such as ibuprofen and other NSAIDs may be used to help control non-neuropathic pain. When this type of pain is caused by muscle stiffness or spasticity, **muscle relaxants** such as baclofen, tizanidine, and cyclobenzaprine may be used. Possible side effects may include weakness, dizziness, dry mouth, and drowsiness.



When pain is not effectively controlled despite the use of some of these medicines, your healthcare provider may refer you to a pain specialist.

Non-drug treatments

These may be used in conjunction with medical treatment and can also help improve your pain:

- Physical therapy
- Occupational therapy
- Physical activity and healthy lifestyle
- Avoiding known triggers
- Alternative therapies such as yoga, acupuncture, meditation and relaxation techniques