

EIGHT ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN CHOOSING A MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS TREATMENT

SHORT-TERM CONSIDERATIONS

1. Does the treatment reduce the rate of flare-ups?

A *flare-up* (also known as a *relapse*, *exacerbation*, *episode*, or *attack*) is when 1 or more relapsing MS symptoms worsen or new ones appear for at least 24 hours.

2. Was the treatment proven to reduce new or enlarging brain lesions* on an MRI scan?†‡

Lesions are abnormalities in the brain or spinal cord. Healthcare providers look at MRI scans to see the lesions associated with MS. The number, size, and location of the lesions may not correlate with your symptoms or disability progression, but they do give your healthcare provider a picture of the activity going on in the nervous system.

*Both T2 new or enlarging lesions and gadolinium (Gd)-enhancing T1 lesions. Gadolinium is an imaging agent used to highlight new or enlarging lesions.

†Refers to new lesions and total lesion burden or area as defined in the AAN & MS Council guidelines.

‡Lesions detected with both Gd-enhanced/T1-weighted and PD/T2-weighted MRI.

3. What are the side effects of the treatments I'm considering?

All treatments have side effects. To truly compare safety profiles of different treatments, a head-to-head study is needed. Be sure to discuss the side effect profile of any treatment you are considering with your healthcare provider.

LONG-TERM CONSIDERATIONS

4. Has the treatment been shown to slow disability progression?

Over time, MS can often lead to a worsening of a person's mobility (movement and walking ability). Eventually, some people may develop other physical disabilities. Some treatments have been proven to slow down disability progression. This is an important topic to discuss with your healthcare provider.

5. What are the risks versus benefits of the treatments I'm considering?

Since everyone living with MS is different, you and your healthcare provider need to consider the pros and cons of each therapy and decide together which is the best option for you. Some treatments have risks that others do not have. Be sure to discuss the risks and benefits of any treatment you're considering with your healthcare provider.

6. How will the treatment affect my immune system?

Treating MS can be a balancing act: On the one hand, your healthcare provider wants to stop your immune system from attacking your nerves. On the other hand, your healthcare provider wants your immune system to be healthy enough to protect your body from harm. All MS treatments affect the immune system in some way, so finding the right balance between the risk to your immune system and the benefits of treatment is important to discuss.

7. What are the safety profiles of the treatments I'm considering?

All treatments that are available have been tested in clinical trials in order to be approved by the FDA. And after approval of all products, safety monitoring continues. Different healthcare providers use different criteria when choosing treatments.

8. Does the treatment offer dosing around your schedule?

Today, there are a variety of different treatment regimens available. When you meet with your healthcare provider, ask about treatments that may work for you.

If you have any other questions, don't hesitate to ask your healthcare provider. It's important that you feel comfortable with the treatment you choose.

FIVE THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND AS YOU SPEAK WITH YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER

1. Don't downplay your symptoms or feelings.

Remember, the people on your healthcare team are experts in caring for people living with relapsing MS—try to tell them exactly how you are doing.

2. If you don't understand something, ask for clarification.

Try to repeat back, in your own words, what your healthcare provider says. This way you can be sure you understand. It can also be helpful to bring another person to your visit to help take notes.

3. Be honest about your treatment habits.

If you've been skipping treatment, tell your healthcare provider. There's nothing to be ashamed of. Remember, they can't help you if they don't know what's really going on. Your healthcare provider may have tips that can help you get back on track and stay motivated.

4. Don't be uncomfortable about an issue or ever feel a question is "bad."

Your healthcare provider is there to help, and most likely, he or she has heard it before.

5. Ask about a follow-up.

What are the next steps? How does your healthcare provider like to keep in touch? Phone? Email? Do you need to plan another visit right now?

These simple tips will help you get the most out of your visit.

NOTES

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Questions?

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