

# Let's Talk about Pain

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Although we may not like to think about it, pain is a reality of life for a number of MS patients. There are several ways in which you can partner with your healthcare provider to help manage your pain. First, let's go over a few facts about the types of pain an MS patient may experience. Knowing which type(s) of pain you are experiencing will help in designing the most effective treatment plan.

## **Musculoskeletal Pain**

Musculoskeletal pain (aching in joints, back, neck or limbs) may occur for a wide variety of reasons not related to MS. MS does not directly cause this type of pain. However, weakness and/or spasticity caused by your MS may result in pain.

Spasticity- spasticity may cause a painful tightening of muscles similar to a "charley horse" or muscle strain. Spasticity of the bladder muscles can cause a cramping sensation.

Weakness- weakness does not directly cause pain, but weakness and/or spasticity can cause abnormal posture and gait, and change the way you perform daily activities. These imbalances can result in muscle soreness, or joint pain because joints are not well supported by strong muscles.

## **Pain Related Directly to MS**

MS can cause several kinds of nerve related pain. These types of pain are caused when nerves affected by MS don't transmit their messages properly. The most common kinds are:

1. Pain in or behind the eye (may be accompanied by blurred vision)
2. Pain on one side of the face (trigeminal neuralgia)
3. Burning and/or tingling pain (dysesthesia)
4. Sharp, shooting pains in arms, legs, and /or trunk

## **Treating Pain**

First, it is important to find the cause of your pain. Many types of illnesses, infections and injuries can cause pain. So the place to start is with your primary care provider. If he/ or she rules out other problems as the source of your pain, you can then suspect that it may related to your MS.

Your neurologist or nurse practitioner can help diagnose and treat pain related to your MS. The good news is that there are many excellent treatments available for pain. Treatment for your pain may include medications, exercise, assistive devices, or other modalities. If your pain is a symptom of an exacerbation, your treatment may include a course of IV steroids. The key to good pain management is clear communication with your healthcare provider, and a willingness on your part to carry out the treatment plan.

Be prepared to give your healthcare provider the following information:

1. What the pain feels like (burning, stabbing, throbbing, etc)
2. Where the pain is located
3. When the pain started
4. Whether the pain is constant, or if it comes and goes
5. How severe the pain is, on a scale of 1 to 10
6. What makes the pain better and what makes it worse
7. Any other symptoms you are having (blurred vision, weakness, etc)
8. Any treatments you have already tried for the pain

Pain is a very real challenge, and each person's pain is different. Working together, you and your healthcare provider can find the treatment plan which is best for you. Here's to a more comfortable life!