

Multiple Sclerosis (MS)

What is Multiple Sclerosis?

Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a neurological condition that affects the central nervous system. Many different symptoms can appear depending on which part of the brain or spinal cord is involved.

If you wish to know more information about your diagnosis and support available in your area, please visit the charity website on: www.mssociety.org.uk

How can MS affect communication?

Around 40% of those with MS experience changes to their speech. Neurological changes can affect the muscles of the tongue and lips making speech pronunciation more difficult. The medical term for this is dysarthria. Some of the more common changes associated with dysarthria and MS are:

- Slurred, imprecise or slower speech
- Difficulty with changing the pitch of your voice (may sound monotonous)
- Sounding like you're speaking through the nose
- Long pauses between words or between syllables
- Breath support required for speaking may become more effortful resulting in reduced volume

People with MS can experience decreased cognitive functioning, which may also impact communication. People may experience:

- Slow thinking/slow learning/reduced attention and inability to follow fast conversations
- Losing one's train of thought while speaking
- Difficulties problem solving and forward planning
- Problems storing and retrieving memories
- Difficulty making sense of perceptions/concepts

- Problems with language (e.g. word-finding difficulties)
- Difficulty sequencing actions, making it harder to carry out everyday tasks

How can Speech & Language Therapy help?

A Speech and Language Therapist can:

- Assess your communication needs
- Offer advice and support
- Provide strategies to support you and your communication partner
- Discuss alternative methods of communication if speech becomes more difficult

How can MS affect swallowing?

Between 30-40% of those with MS may experience some difficulties with eating and drinking. The swallowing difficulties that you may experience will vary dependent on the type of MS that you have and the stage of your condition.

Swallowing difficulty is known as dysphagia. Symptoms of dysphagia include:

- Problems chewing and food residue remaining in your mouth after swallowing
- Food sticking in your throat
- Food and drink coming back up into your mouth after you have swallowed
- Sluggish movement of food from the mouth to the stomach
- Coughing and spluttering during and after eating or drinking
- Excessive saliva, which may cause dribbling
- Chest infections caused by aspiration (food and drink going down 'the wrong way')
- Weight loss and dehydration due to reduced oral intake.

How can Speech & Language Therapy help?

The Speech and Language Therapist will assess the safety of your swallow and offer advice on ways to help reduce risk. They will:

- Recommend the safest food and drinks for you to have – this may include avoiding hard, dry or crumbly foods. It may also involve thickening drinks to make them move more slowly in the oral cavity, this will give you more time to protect your airway.
- Advise you on safe swallowing strategies – this may include advice on safe postures, appropriate sized mouthfuls/ sips, safe speed for feeding and advice on environmental changes
- Advise your family, carers and friends on how to support you
- Liaise with other professionals such as your GP, Dietitian and Specialist Nurses where appropriate.

How to contact us

**Speech and Language Therapy
Departments Office hours:
Monday-Friday 9am - 4.30pm**

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Useful contacts

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Charity Website: www.mssociety.org.uk

Contact details



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We need your comments, concerns complaints and compliments to deliver the best service possible. Please let us know by speaking to a member of our staff. We learn from your feedback and use the information to improve and develop our services.

If you would like to talk to someone outside the service contact the **Patient Experience Team** on **0800 783 5774**, or email cdda-tr.PatientExperienceCDDFT@nhs.net.

We can make this information available in Braille, large print, audio or other languages on request.