



Associated Neurologists of Southern Connecticut

Health & Wellness Newsletter

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Multiple Sclerosis – A Neurologist's Perspective

By Jeffrey Gross, M.D.

President and Managing Partner



Multiple Sclerosis is an inflammatory disease of the brain and spinal cord that is most frequently diagnosed between the ages of 20-50. This condition presents with many different symptoms and manifestations that challenge neurologists both in the diagnostic and treatment phases of the disease. At Associated Neurologists of Southern Connecticut, we have developed many resources to meet this challenge. In the diagnostic phase, our neurologists have onsite evoked response testing and lumbar puncture. For the treatment of the disease, we have an infusion suite for administration of medication to suppress disease activity and treat exacerbations. We have a team of physician assistants and nurses ready to help with patient education, treatment and disease management. Additionally, we manage intrathecal Baclofen pumps and administer Botox for spasticity control.

The ANSC clinical research division actively participates in many clinical trials that help develop new treatments for MS. For some people with MS, clinical trial participation is their best opportunity to receive treatment with the most advanced medications with out having to bear any of the cost.

Multiple sclerosis is a multi-dimensional condition. For some people with MS, assessment of cognitive function and emotional issues provides vital information for disease management, accommodation of the work environment or obtaining benefits from insurance or social security. Our neuropsychologists at ANSC have extensive training and experience in evaluating the MS population.

For many people with MS, additional resources help them realize their full potential to work and enjoy life. The Health and Wellness Center at ANSC helps our MS population deal with disease adjustment, stress reduction and physical well-being through counseling, acupuncture and medical massage. The Health and Wellness Center compliments the other resources at ANSC and helps reach our goal of providing the most comprehensive, highest quality care for people with multiple sclerosis.

Helping You Live as Fully as Possible



Cognition and MS

By Amy Palmer, Psy.D

Neuropsychology Supervisor



For many years, the focus on MS symptoms was related to motor or sensory disturbance. However, recent attention has been paid to the cognitive symptoms of MS. While some individuals with MS will never experience any change in their memory or thinking, many will find that they do not feel as "sharp" as they used to. Common complaints include decreased attention, slowed speed of thinking and difficulty retrieving learned information. Other possible cognitive changes with MS include poor visual spatial skills, reduced ability to control impulses, and difficulty learning new things.

How should these cognitive changes be handled? The first recommendation is to have a brief baseline screening of your neuropsychological functioning. At ANSC, patients with MS can undergo a brief (30 minute) computerized testing battery followed by a consultation with one of our neuropsychologists. If at some point you notice a change in your cognition, a repeat of this testing can be performed to determine the nature and extent of this change. If needed, a more comprehensive neuropsychological evaluation can be completed to further flush out strengths and weaknesses to better guide treatment planning.

There are several reasons why cognitive testing is important in MS. First, knowledge is power. Having an understanding of cognitive strengths and weaknesses can translate into real world recommendations. For example, if someone is having difficulty with memory, it would be beneficial to set up reminder systems, such as alarms to remember to take medications. Furthermore, cognitive rehabilitation with a speech therapist or neuropsychologist could teach compensatory strategies in dealing with cognitive weaknesses. In addition, problems with cognition can impact job performance. Identifying any problems early and setting up appropriate accommodations and strategies could prevent or delay an individual needing to apply for disability. Finally, should the decision be made to apply for disability, an evaluation may support the application.

If you would like more information about cognition and MS, talk to your neurologist. A referral to one of our neuropsychologists could be the first step in learning more about yourself and setting up a treatment plan to help you improve your daily living.

Clinical Research and MS: How and Why to Get Involved

By Peter McAllister, MD



There are currently seven approved Multiple Sclerosis drugs, and while this may seem like plenty, there continues to be a need to address unmet treatment needs. Neurologists and patients alike know that MS is a highly variable condition, and what works or is tolerated by one, may be ineffective or harmful to another. The MS community (health care providers, patients and their loved ones, and support societies) anxiously await the next breakthrough that will improve the quality of life of those afflicted with this progressive disease.

Every MS treatment available in the United States has undergone large, rigorous nationwide studies in order to be approved by the Food and Drug Administration. At The Research Center at ANSC, we are proud to be part of that process. Having participated in over fifty national and international clinical trials, we are well positioned to provide our patients the latest "cutting edge" in MS research, offering access to new and exciting treatment options before they come to the market.

You may be wondering...what's in it for me? All study participants receive free medication for the duration of the study, and all research related procedures (Blood tests, MRI scans, etc.) are also at no cost. Additionally, many studies provide a modest financial stipend to cover time and travel. Participants will also have the satisfaction of knowing that they are an integral part of the scientific process used to get new disease-modifying therapies to those who need them most.

Is there a downside to enrolling in a clinical research study? While every endeavor is made to ensure safety and tolerability, clinical research by its very nature involves innovative therapeutics and as such, may encompass risk. At The Research Center at ANSC we only partake in trials of compounds we believe have an excellent safety and tolerability profile. Additionally, potential participants read and sign an informed consent which outlines all risks, benefits and side-effects. Participation in a clinical research study is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time.

If you or someone you know may be interested in a clinical research study, ask your neurologist for details, or you can contact The Research Center directly at 203-333-1151. Becoming a part of the MS research process at Associated Neurologists of Southern Connecticut may not only help you, but your participation will benefit countless others as we strive to discover safe and innovative disease-altering therapeutics.

Managing Multiple Sclerosis Fatigue

By [Deb Del Vecchio-Scully, LPC, NCC, NBCCH](#)

ANSC Health and Wellness Coordinator



Fatigue is one of the most common side effects of Multiple Sclerosis, affecting approximately 75% of those with MS (National Multiple Sclerosis Society). Of those people, half report fatigue as the most challenging MS symptom. Fatigue is a daily lack of energy with unusual whole-body tiredness that doesn't improve with sleep. It differs from common tiredness, which does improve with rest. You may notice that the fatigue worsens as the day goes on; it may come on suddenly and is worsened if overheated. Fatigue can interfere with normal day to day functioning, affecting quality of life.

The good news is there are many helpful strategies to learn to manage fatigue. It is very important that you communicate your concerns with your physician who can recommend practical solutions and discuss medications with you. Managing stress and anxiety, while increasing physical activity are important factors in managing fatigue.

Adopt a mind-body approach toward managing fatigue by learning how to manage stress effectively, obtain restorative sleep and manage pain with the following tips:

- ◆ Identify your personal warning signs of fatigue which may include whole body tiredness, tired eyes, decreased energy, difficulty concentrating, lack of motivation, and increased nervousness and anxiety, impatience and irritability.
- ◆ Mindfulness Meditation has been shown to improve fatigue, reduce stress and alleviate depression for people with MS. Clinical Hypnosis and other relaxation methods are helpful as well.
- ◆ Gentle yoga that doesn't raise your core temperature can increase energy and reduce stress and discomfort.
- ◆ Learning personalized energy conservation strategies can enhance performance of daily living tasks and help to pace activity. For example, plan high energy activities like grocery shopping in the morning when energy is usually highest.
- ◆ Addressing MS related pain; spasticity or headaches can reduce fatigue.

The ANSC Health and Wellness Center offers many services and resources to address MS related fatigue, pain, insomnia and much more. Please contact our Neuropsychology Coordinator, Blanca for more information—203.333.1133, x 152.

Massage Therapy and Multiple Sclerosis

By Courtney Blaze, LMT



Multiple sclerosis (or MS) is a chronic disease that attacks the central nervous system (brain, spinal cord, and optic nerves) characterized by relapses and remissions and often progression of disability over time. Most people with MS learn to manage the disease and continue to lead satisfying, productive lives however there are many alternative therapies that people with MS can use in their daily regime to help alleviate some of the symptoms associated with the disease.

When it comes to MS and massage therapy the benefits are twofold. First, when applied appropriately a good massage can help to relieve some of the symptoms of MS. Secondly, massage therapy can help relieve the everyday stress that daily life can cause allowing you to relax. Just being able to relax may help reduce the frequency and severity of many of the symptoms of MS.

Many types of massage and bodywork are available. For some people deep tissue massage or trigger point therapy may bring relief while for others these massage techniques may create additional pain. Some people can tolerate only gentle therapies such as myofascial release or light Swedish massage.

Massage therapy can play an effective role in reducing both the symptoms of MS and the stress of daily life by:

- ◆ Easing joint stiffness; massage increases blood circulation in muscles around joints, which creates more pliable tendons, ligaments, and other connective tissue. More pliable tissue means easier joint movement.
- ◆ Reducing muscle weakness or atrophy; it's important to maintain the integrity of muscle tissue. Massage therapy improves the circulation of oxygenated, nutrient rich blood to muscles and other tissues.
- ◆ Lessening excess muscle tension or spasticity; many massage techniques reduce abnormal muscle tone, relieve pain, and increase circulation and muscle length to reduce spasm. Other massage strokes sedate the nervous system or local peripheral nerves, which temporarily reduces their exaggerated stimulation of muscle fibers.

Although massage therapy may not be for everyone it is a wonderful alternative to consider. There is no "MS cure", only ways of coping. For the MS patient, a well-being approach for addressing body, mind, and spirit is essential to combating the effects of the disease.

Acupuncture for Multiple Sclerosis

[By Hanni Heller, LAc](#)

Licensed Acupuncturist



Although acupuncture cannot cure or reverse MS, it can help in managing many of the signs and symptoms associated with it. Pain (any), numbness and tingling, muscle spasms, muscle weakness, bladder and bowel dysfunction, depression and moodiness, are only a few of the conditions acupuncture successfully improves or even resolves. There is some evidence that when acupuncture treatments were started in the early stages of the disease, progression of the disease was delayed.

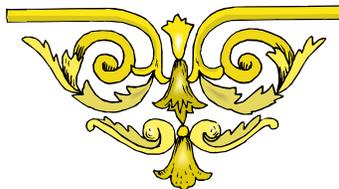
Your diagnosis and treatment will depend on your individual signs and symptoms, and treatment will be tailored specifically for your individual needs. During treatment, thin sterile needles are inserted into specific points on the body in order to stimulate your own ability to restore balance and optimal health. The benefits of acupuncture are accumulative and changes are reported by many in as few as 5 treatments.

One of the most promising treatment method is Scalp acupuncture, a form of acupuncture in which needles are inserted into the scalp and strongly stimulated.

For more information please read the following article.

acupuncturetoday.com/mpacms/at/article.php?id=31710

If you would like more information about the acupuncture services at ANSC, please ask to speak to the Neuropsychology Coordinator, Blanca—203.333.1133, x 152.



Gentle Yoga and Multiple Sclerosis

By [Deb Del Vecchio-Scully, LPC, NCC, NBCCH](#)
Certified Yoga Therapist



Yoga is a mind-body ancient practice that is promotes healing and well-being in the mind, body and emotions. There are many types of yoga, from the "hot" Bikram style known for heating rooms well over 100 degrees to a gentle, therapeutic yoga designed to allow everyone and every-body to enjoy the many benefits of a yoga practice. Yoga consists of physical postures (asana), breathwork (pranayama), concentration (Dharana) and meditation (Dhyana) practiced in balance with one another to enhance wellness.

For people living with MS, finding the right style of yoga can yield improvement in fatigue (Oken, 2003) and may help to reduce stress and chronic pain. The ideal yoga class and teacher will guide you in creating your own practice and help you to modify postures and breathwork to meet your needs. A teacher with a therapeutic yoga background as a yoga therapist is ideal to introduce you to yoga!



Helpful Tips:

- ◆ Stay cool - avoid overheating yourself while practicing.
- ◆ Take a gentle approach to practice - try chair yoga or focus on yogic breathing techniques as a way to begin.
- ◆ Modify, modify, modify! Let a yoga practice meet you where you are.

Try ANSC's Gentle Chair Yoga Class led by yoga therapist Deb Del Vecchio-Scully who has 12 years experience teaching yoga to those with medical illnesses and chronic pain. To schedule a session, please call Blanca, Neuropsychology Coordinator, 203.333.1133, x 152.

Multiple Sclerosis Resources

Multiple Sclerosis Society

<http://multiplesclerosis.com>

National Institute of Health

<http://health.nih.gov/topic/MultipleSclerosis>

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke

http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/multiple_sclerosis/multiple_sclerosis.htm

Parenting with Multiple Sclerosis

By Christine McCarthy, Ph.D



Parents with Multiple Sclerosis are confronted with a unique array of challenges. In particular, it is difficult to find a balance between meeting your medically warranted needs and the compelling needs of your children. Honest and open communication with your children is the key component in attaining this balance.

Some helpful practices include:

- ◆ Be guided by your children's age when speaking with them about your MS symptoms. Young children benefit from very simple explanations and reassurances that they cannot 'catch' your MS symptoms. Older children will be receptive to more complex explanations about the physical bases of your MS symptoms and about expectations for disease progression. Consult with the MS Society website for ideas about how to tell your children about your health at the time of your initial diagnosis and about ongoing changes in your health.
- ◆ Reassure your children that their needs are very important to you. Be honest about the possibility that your MS symptoms may occasionally prevent you from keeping promises about involvement in their activities and events. Have a backup plan.
- ◆ Keep their routines and schedules as regular as possible. Readily accept all help offered for rides and running errands.
- ◆ Reassure your children that your fatigue and fluctuating symptoms are not their fault (i.e. *My MS makes me feel tired.*”).
- ◆ Share information with the school regarding your health, as needed, so that teachers and school-based clinicians can meet your child's emotional needs.
- ◆ Be as kind to yourself as you are to your children.

On the positive side, children who grow up with in a family impacted by chronic illnesses such as MS are likely to develop high levels of emotional sensitivity and empathy towards others. Your children will also benefit from exposure to your health-promoting habits for eating, exercising, and sleeping.

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