

If you have any further queries about cognitive problems, there are some useful sources of information below:

[www.msactivesource.co.uk](http://www.msactivesource.co.uk)

[www.msactivesource.ie](http://www.msactivesource.ie)

[www.msdecisions.org.uk](http://www.msdecisions.org.uk)

The following organisations are also available to help:

Multiple Sclerosis Society

[www.mssociety.org.uk](http://www.mssociety.org.uk)

Helpline: 0808 800 8000

email: [helpline@mssociety.org.uk](mailto:helpline@mssociety.org.uk)

Multiple Sclerosis Trust

[www.msstrust.org.uk](http://www.msstrust.org.uk)

Tel: 01462 476700

email: [info@msstrust.org.uk](mailto:info@msstrust.org.uk)

Irish Multiple Sclerosis Society

[www.ms-society.ie](http://www.ms-society.ie)

Helpline: 1850 233233

email: [mshelpline@ms-society.ie](mailto:mshelpline@ms-society.ie)

Multiple Sclerosis International Federation

[www.msif.org](http://www.msif.org)

Tel: 020 7620 1911



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Thinking about memory and problem solving



Supporting you  
each step of the way

# Questions you may have

## How does MS affect memory and thinking?

Many people find MS can affect their cognition. That is, how the mind stores, organises and recalls information. Typical symptoms include:

- loss of memory
- shortened attention span
- slower responses when trying to solve problems
- trouble processing information when a lot is coming all at once
- difficulty in finding words – the experience of a word being ‘on the tip of your tongue’

## Will I experience cognitive difficulties?

Not everyone will experience cognitive problems, although it is thought up to 65% of people with MS may develop difficulties with their memory and thinking at some stage.

As with other symptoms, it is not possible to predict if and when cognitive problems will occur. While it is thought to be more common in people who’ve had MS for some time, for others problems start early in the disease and may even be the first symptom.

It’s also worth noting that there is no relationship between cognitive problems and physical symptoms. A person with almost no physical symptoms may experience cognitive difficulties, while someone else may only have physical symptoms.

## What causes cognitive problems?

Cognitive symptoms can be a direct result of MS lesions which damage the parts of the brain that control thinking. Or they may be associated with depression, anxiety, stress and fatigue, all of which are common with MS and can affect your thinking.

## Can cognitive problems be prevented?

Disease modifying therapies (DMTs) slow down the rate at which lesions develop. If fewer lesions are developing, it follows there will be a lower risk of them causing damage in the part of the brain that affects cognition. Results from clinical trials for at least one DMT have shown it reduces the risk of cognitive problems.

## Is there any treatment?

Unfortunately, there are no medications for cognitive problems, but there are ways to minimise their impact. For example, cognitive behavioural therapy can help you find ways to compensate and retrain your thought processing, and a speech and language therapist may be able to help you with word-finding problems. What’s most important is that if you experience problems you speak to your MS nurse or neurologist who can refer you to a person who can help.

## What can I do to cope with memory loss?

To help you day to day, you may find the following tips useful:

- Keep a diary. Write down all appointment, reminders and a ‘to do’ list. Jot down notes with time, date and a short summary of any important conversations. Refer to the diary regularly
- Have a large family calendar in a prominent place noting everyone’s agenda and activities
- Wear a watch with an alarm that can remind you of events, or use your mobile
- If you prefer, programme appointments and reminders in to your laptop and other electronic tools to remind you of events
- Use Post-it® notes
- Follow the principle ‘everything has a place, and everything in its place’. This way you’ll find it easier to locate things
- Design a master shopping list with all your usual items. Before you go shopping tick off everything you need
- When you are experiencing difficulties, try to stay calm. Becoming tense or anxious may make you feel worse

Your MS nurse will also have lots of tips to help you manage these kinds of symptoms.