

Although each person's experience is different, you may want to talk to a third party about your MS and sexually-related issues. Your MS nurse or doctor will be able to put you in touch with someone locally. If not you can talk to others, find out about support groups or receive further information through the contacts 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.mstrust.org.uk](http://www.mstrust.org.uk)  
Tel: 01462 476700  
email: [info@mstrust.org.uk](mailto:info@mstrust.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)



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Thinking about relationships



Supporting you  
each step of the way

# Thinking about relationships

## ■ What about sexual wellbeing?

Coming to terms with the impact of MS on your everyday life is difficult, but realising that it will affect your sexual relationships can cause further worry as well as embarrassment. MS can affect the way you think and feel about intimacy, both on physical and mental levels. Sometimes just being touched can be painful. Or you may feel low about how you look because you may not always be able to spend time taking care of your body. The important thing to remember is that sex does not have to disappear from your and your partner's life because of MS. There is a range of treatment options available to help you maintain a healthy sex life.

## ■ Talking about it

Sometimes the last thing you want to do is talk about sex, especially if you're feeling vulnerable, frustrated or depressed. You may lack confidence because your clothes don't fit like they used to. Or perhaps you feel you have nothing left to give because you are struggling to cope with managing the disease day-to-day. When you feel tired, lethargic and a bit down, it's only natural your sex drive will be affected. It can be the case that a partner who is well pulls away from sex to avoid hurting the MS sufferer. Sometimes roles can be confused and the one who is well can feel more like a carer than a sexual partner.

There may also be physical symptoms you are anxious about, like bladder or bowel accidents. But, embarrassing as these are, they won't be

as worrying if you confide in each other. These symptoms are manageable and your MS nurse will be able to tell you about the treatments available.

That's why good communication is important. By making sure that you both understand the symptoms, you can see what is and isn't possible. You can also become closer and it can help to minimise your fears or answer your partner's questions. Being open and honest about sex and the way MS affects your body and your mind will help.

## ■ How to manage if there are problems

For men, one common symptom of MS can be not being able to gain an erection. This happens because the nervous impulses that travel between the central nervous system and the penis are sometimes affected. There are various treatments available that can be taken with your MS therapy. These range from tablets to more sophisticated surgical devices.

For women, symptoms can include reduced sensation, vaginal dryness and loss of libido. Over the counter treatments are available for dryness, while body mapping can improve reduced sensation by exploring other areas of your body that aren't painful. Improving fitness with regular exercise can also improve sexual function and, in turn, desire.

Massage is an effective way of being intimate with your partner. It can also help relieve symptoms like muscle spasms and numbness. Reduced frequency and/or intensity of orgasm may also be a factor, but

there may be ways to counteract all of these things with the right treatment. So do speak to your nurse or doctor.

## ■ Fertility, conception and pregnancy

Don't think that you can't get pregnant just because you have MS. If you would like to have a baby, the good news is that MS doesn't directly affect fertility in men or women. That said, if one partner is having sexual difficulties, these may need to be addressed before you try to conceive.

During pregnancy a woman's MS normally goes into remission, but the later stages of pregnancy can be particularly tiring.

Some medications used to treat MS should be stopped before you get pregnant. That's why it is best to make your neurologist aware that you are planning to try for a baby. MS treatment should generally be stopped before you attempt to conceive and not restarted until you have finished breast-feeding. But there should be no special requirements for the birth itself.

The chances of a person developing MS may be slightly higher if one of their parents suffer from the condition.

Talk to your MS nurse who can support and advise you if you are considering having a baby, or if you have other concerns about sexually-related issues.