

MS Essentials Tips



RECOGNIZING AN MS RELAPSE

People with relapsing-remitting multiple sclerosis experience periodic relapses – a worsening of neurological symptoms, such as nerve tingling, loss of sensation, muscle weakness or pain. Relapses provide an important clue about how active your MS is, and how well your medication is controlling the disease process.

It's important to telephone your MS clinic to report any relapses you are having. Your MS clinic team will determine the best course of action to manage your symptoms.

An MS relapse is...

- An episode of new neurological symptoms, or a worsening of neurological symptoms you've had before. These symptoms can include nerve tingling (“pins and needles”), a loss of sensation or numbness, muscle weakness, nerve pain, bladder or bowel problems, poor balance, difficulty walking, difficulty swallowing, vision problems, and so on.
- To be a true relapse, the symptoms must last for at least 24-48 hours (the effects of the relapse may linger for weeks or months).
- **Do not** report a worsening of symptoms that are associated with an elevated body temperature resulting from a fever, infection, vigorous exercise, or heat exposure (e.g. hot bath, hot tub, sun exposure). A raised body temperature can temporarily worsen your MS symptoms – but this isn't a true relapse. Your MS symptoms will improve once you cool down.

Do I have a urinary tract infection (UTI)?

UTIs are common in people with MS, especially in people who require a catheter to empty their bladder. UTIs can worsen your neurological symptoms, which can be mistaken for an MS relapse.

Common symptoms of a UTI can include:

- Fever
- Painful urination
- New bladder symptoms, such as a frequent need to urinate, increased urinary urgency, or incontinence
- Blood in your urine
- Pain or tenderness in your pelvis, leg muscles feeling stiff, tight or weak

If you think you have a UTI...

- 1 Increase your fluid intake (at least 1 litre per day)
- 2 See your family doctor

Note: Worsening MS symptoms during a UTI or other infection are often not a true relapse, and do not need to be reported to the MS clinic unless they persist after the infection has cleared up.