

The course of MS is unpredictable. Some people are minimally affected by disease, while others have rapid progress to total disability, with most people fitting between these two extremes. Although every individual will experience a different combination of MS symptoms there are a number of distinct patterns relating to the course of the disease:

Relapsing–Remitting MS

In this form of MS there are unpredictable relapses (exacerbations, attacks) during which new symptoms appear or existing symptoms become more severe. This can last for varying periods (days or months) and there is partial or total remission (recovery). The disease may be inactive for months or years.

- ✦ Frequency – approx 25%

Benign MS

After one or two attacks with complete recovery, this form of MS does not worsen with time and there is no permanent disability. Benign MS can only be identified when there is minimal disability 10–15 years after onset and initially would have been categorised as relapsing–remitting MS. Benign MS tends to be associated with less severe symptoms at onset (e.g. sensory).

- ✦ Frequency – approx 20%

Secondary Progressive MS

For some individuals who initially have relapsing–remitting MS, there is the development of progressive disability later in the course of the disease often with superimposed relapses.

- ✦ Frequency – approx 40%

Primary Progressive MS

This form of MS is characterised by a lack of distinct attacks, but with slow onset and steadily worsening symptoms. There is an accumulation of deficits and disability which may level off at some point or continue over months and years.

- ✦ Frequency – approx 15%