

The benefits of an extended outpatient rehabilitation programme for severely impaired patients with progressive MS was described by DiFabio et al (1998). The purpose of the programme was to maintain physical functioning and to improve coping skills. In addition to physical and occupational therapy, there were extensive support services, including support groups, social work, therapeutic recreation, seating and positioning clinics, nutritional education, and wound and fall prevention programmes. Participants met once weekly for a 5-hour session for a full year. Two groups were assessed, the treatment group consisting of 20 patients, and the comparison group consisting of 26 patients remaining on a waiting list. After 1 year, the patients who had participated in the outpatient rehabilitation programme experienced fewer symptoms, had less fatigue, and showed a lower rate of decline in physical functioning than did subjects on the waiting list.

Van Sint Annaland (1999) presented a case report of a person with relapsing-remitting multiple sclerosis who participated to a gym programme, 3 times a week over a 5-month period. The exercises consisted of weight training to muscle groups in the lower limbs and trunk, using weights ranging from 7 to 20 kg; treadmill walking for 20-30 minutes at 3-4 km/h; and associated balance activities on a gymnastic ball. The 5-month programme was interrupted midway for a period of 3 weeks by a deterioration in her condition following a relapse. The results on motor assessments (10 m timed walk, Berg balance test, Motor Club assessment) declined at the time of the relapse, but were restored to the original level after 3 weeks. After the period of 5 months, no significant changes were noted for these motor performances, possibly due to the relapse that had occurred during this time. The patient, however, described some positive effects from the rehabilitation programme ".....Regular exercise at a gym has made daily living less of a challenge and more enjoyable and a pleasure rather than always being an effort. I find myself doing more around the house. I now feel I have better balance and improved stability. I have more enthusiasm for doing things as opposed to being sluggish and stiff when not exercising. You seem to have more energy and stamina. Having always been stiff I have noticed walking out of the gym a lot better than walking in. Bowel function has improved with regular exercise....."