

THE IMPACT OF MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS ON COMMUNICATIONS

Multiple Sclerosis is a disease in which a person's immune system attacks the protective coating over the nerves. This damage causes gaps in the brain's ability to communicate with the rest of the body. These gaps impair movement and speech, as well as causing pain or numbness throughout the body.

Before discussing how to communicate with individuals with Multiple Sclerosis, it is important to first understand the types of communication (Merriam Webster, 2015).

Types of Communication

- ♦ Verbal Communication
 - Spoken words
- ♦ Nonverbal Communication
 - Eye contact
 - Body language
 - Tone of voice
 - Facial expressions
- ♦ Written Communication
 - Pen and paper
 - Pamphlets
 - Diagrams
 - Pictures

Tips for effective communication with people who have Multiple Sclerosis (ASHA, 2015):

- ♦ Be patient. Giving the individual a minute to think about what you said and how to answer might be necessary.
- ♦ Allow the other person to know when you are changing subjects by pausing or prompting them on the new topic.
- ♦ If the individual is having trouble following the conversation, remind them what you were talking about.
- ♦ If someone does not understand what you are saying and you have repeated it several times, try to describe it in a different way.
- ♦ Keep your voice at a normal volume; do not shout or yell.
- ♦ Do not interrupt; allow the other person to speak and listen carefully.
- ♦ When giving instructions, ask the individual to repeat things back to you, as well as requesting them to summarize what they were told. If they are unable to repeat it back, take another approach, such as writing out directions or demonstrating it for them.
- ♦ Open-ended questions can be difficult, so try giving the individual two options. If this is still too difficult, try asking "yes" or "no" questions.
- ♦ If the individual is unable to follow the conversation or is having trouble participating, try a different form of communicating, like thumbs up or down, or showing them pictures of what you are asking.
- ♦ If you or the other individual is becoming frustrated because they cannot express themselves, take a deep breath, giving both of you a moment in silence to help refocus.
- ♦ Most importantly, always be respectful, address the individual even if they cannot express themselves, and do not converse as if they are not there.



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