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August 2020 Newsletter

Offering support, care, and hope...*right here at home!*

All Support Group Meetings and Newsletter Folding are Cancelled Till further Notice!

We are continuing to work behind the scenes to make sure the telephone calls, emails, and office needs are being handled. It is important to us that we provide up-to-date information on our website and Facebook page for you. Please stay home, stay safe, and stay well!

Send your email address to officemanager@tristatems.org to receive newsletters and programs!

The Mission of the Tri-State Multiple Sclerosis Association is to enhance the quality of life for individuals living with MS & their families in Southern IN, Southern IL, & Western KY

Cognitive Problems and MS

Susan Reynolds RN, MSCN

Did you know that cognitive problems occur in about two-thirds of people with MS? Ten to fifteen percent of people with MS have significant problems that lead to decreased job performance and altered social skills. Cognitive impairment does not affect every person with MS the same way. Some people may find that the signs and symptoms are only a minor annoyance; others find that they interfere significantly with work, home life, and social life.

It takes highly myelinated nerve fibers working at top efficiency for the transmission of nerve impulses from front to back and side to side of the brain. This is required for us to have the ability to remember and communicate. MS cognitive problems may affect:

- Information processing (dealing with information gathered by the five senses)
- Memory (acquiring, retaining and retrieving new information)
- Attention and concentration (particularly divided attention)
- Executive functions (planning and prioritizing)
- Visuospatial functions (visual perception and constructional abilities)
- Verbal fluency (word-finding)

A person may experience difficulties in only one or two areas of cognitive functioning or in several. Certain functions including general intellect, long-term (remote) memory, conversational skill, and reading comprehension are likely to remain intact.

The memory problems are often worse with fatigue, heat, or stress, because the demyelinated fibers do not transmit at will under these circumstances. The problem is very different from what is seen with Alzheimer's disease, which involves across the board memory loss. In MS, the deficit can be spotty.

Exercise can improve cognitive problems in MS

Regular walking on a treadmill may improve cognitive abilities and physical fitness in ambulatory patients with relapsing-remitting MS, a small pilot study shows. Brian M. Sandroff, PhD, associate research scientist at the Kessler Foundation, West Orange and colleagues decided to design a pilot trial that would provide proof of the concept that a long-term exercise program could be an optimal intervention to improve cognitive processing speed and executive function in MS.

To participate in the study, subjects had to be able to walk with or without minimal assistance, such as with a cane or crutch. After 3 days of treadmill walking a week, over 12 weeks, the five patients who received the intervention had improvements in cognitive measures, cardiorespiratory fitness, and walking, as measured by the 6-minute walk test.

Researchers still need to answer other questions: Do you have to continue using a treadmill after you finish the 6-week course, and do you have to do it as intensively, or is just doing something better than nothing? Dr. Sandroff and his colleagues will be examining the maintenance effect in a large randomized, controlled trial in patients with MS who have impaired cognition.

Help with Cognitive losses from MS:

New research suggests mindfulness training may help MS patients in two very different ways: regulating negative emotions and improving processing speed. People with MS who underwent the four-week mindfulness training not only improved more compared to those who did nothing, but also improved compared to those who tried another treatment called adaptive cognitive training.

"This was a small pilot study, so we need to replicate the results, but these findings were very encouraging," said Ruchika Prakash, corresponding author of the research and associate professor of psychology at The Ohio State University. "It is exciting to find a treatment that may be helpful in more than one way for people with multiple sclerosis."

The findings were published recently in two journal articles: primary results in *Rehabilitation Psychology*, and secondary analysis in *Neuropsychology*. The study involved 61 people with MS who were placed in one of three groups: four-week mindfulness training, four-week adaptive cognitive training (ACT), or a waitlist control group that did nothing during the study period, but received treatment after the study ended.

Mindfulness-based training involves practicing paying attention to the present moment in a nonjudgmental and accepting manner, according to Prakash, director of OSU's Center for Cognitive and Behavioral Brain Imaging in Columbus. In the sessions, participants learned how to focus on the breath and to do mental "body scans" to experience how their body feels.

Prakash and her team found that those who had mindfulness training were more able than other groups to control their emotions, and their worry decreased. The mindfulness group performed better in a game that demonstrated how fast they understood and completed thinking tasks.

One of the reasons that mindfulness training is so promising is because it is an easily accessible treatment for all patients. "Anyone can use mindfulness, even individuals with limited mobility, who often find other training techniques, like exercise training, to be more challenging," Prakash said. Prakash and her team are now working on replicating this pilot study with a larger sample.

Depression may be a cause of cognitive problems:

Manage your mood. Depression is very common in people with MS and can have a significant impact on cognitive functioning. A key symptom of depression is slowed or impaired thinking.

So if you think you may be experiencing changes in your memory or thinking, ask yourself if depression may be playing a role, and ask your healthcare provider if an evaluation for depression might be a first step toward managing those changes. For people whose cognition is affected by their mood, successfully treating the mood issue can improve their cognitive functioning.

Talk to Your Neurologist:

Your MS treatment team is a first-line resource for addressing cognitive changes. Talking to your neurologist or your primary care doctor about your cognitive changes is an important first step. They can help direct you to a neuropsychologist, a clinical psychologist who specializes in the assessment and treatment of cognitive impairment. He or she will work with you to identify your areas of strength, determine additional factors in your life that may be exacerbating your cognitive difficulties, and make treatment recommendations to help improve or compensate for your cognitive difficulties. Your providers may also help you get connected to speech-language pathologists for evaluation and cognitive rehabilitation therapy. Referrals to occupational therapists for the functional application of cognitive strategies to daily activities and to learn strategies such as energy conservation and fatigue management can also play a significant role in managing cognitive impairment.

Maintain Wellness:

Finally, I want to emphasize that cognitive function, although of high importance, represents only one aspect of overall health and wellness. Maintaining regular physical activity, making healthy nutritional choices, getting adequate sleep, and enlisting support from friends, family, and others in your life are all key components to supporting health and wellness, and they have important implications for your cognitive and emotional wellbeing.

Sources: Treadmill Walking Improves Cognition in MS - Medscape - Jun 08, 2016. Ohio State University. "Mindfulness training shows promise for people with MS: Study shows benefits for emotions, processing speed." ScienceDaily. ScienceDaily, 18 May 2020.

<www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/05/200518144912.htm>. *Rehabilitation Psychology*, May 7, 2020, online; *Neuropsychology*, April 30, 2020, online; HealthDay News May 27, 2020

Healthline.com Picks the Best MS Blogs of 2020:

girlwithms.com Caroline Craven does an amazing job at creating a resource for people with MS. She includes topics such as essential oils, supplement recommendations, and emotional wellness.

multiplesclerosis.net Young writers and MS advocates such as Devin Garlit and Brooke Pelczynski tell it like it is. There's also a section on MS and Mental Health, valuable for anyone battling the emotional impacts of the disease or depression that can come with chronic illness.

acoupletakesonms.com Married couple Jennifer and Dan both have MS *and* care for one another. In their blog, they share details of their day-to-day struggles and successes, along with thoughtful resources to help ease life with MS.

mynewnormals.com Nicole Lemelle has been an advocate in the MS community for as long as many of us can remember, and she's found a sweet spot between telling her story honestly and continuing to inspire and uplift her community.

msconnection.org MS Connection talks about everything from relationships and exercise to career advice and everything in between. It's hosted by the National MS Society, so you'll find valuable research articles tossed in here, too.

Blogmysaaorg Hosted by the Multiple Sclerosis Association of America, the articles are written by people with MS from all walks of life.

multiplescleristoday.com This is online publication serves up MS-related news daily, providing a consistent and up-to-date resource.

mstrust.org.uk/latest/news Hosted by the Multiple Sclerosis Trust. People with MS living abroad and anyone who has an interest in MS will enjoy this variety of articles covering MS research.

blog.mssociety.ca Hosted by Canadian MS Society. With a membership of over 17,000, they're committed to supporting both MS research and services. Browse through research spotlights and funding news, and participate in free educational webinars.

trippingthroughtreacle.com The tagline on this heartwarming, candid blog is "stumbling through life with MS." Jen's honest, empowered perspective resonates through every piece of content here

dinosaursdonkeysandms.com Heather is a 27-year-old actor, teacher, and MS advocate who lives in England. She was diagnosed with MS several years ago, and began blogging thereafter.

Great video logs (Vlogs) Presented by MS Specialist Neurologists:

mslivingwell.org Presented by Dr. Barry Singer's group in St Louis, Mo.

bosterms.com Presented by Dr. Aaron Boster in Columbus, Ohio.

August Webinars:

Understanding Your MS – Presenter: Kristi Nord, MD, Memorial Health Care Center – Neurology
Sponsored by Biogen

Thursday, August 6th; 5:30 pm CST

Registration: abovems.com/en_us/home/ms-services-events/ms-events/event-registration.html?eventID=MF017990 OR 1-866-955-9999

Healthy Lifestyles for Optimal Brain Health – Presenter: Aaron Boster, MD

Thursday, August 6th; 6:00 pm CDT

Registration: register.gotowebinar.com/register/350555499505457422 OR msviewsandnews.com

It's Time to Learn About MAVENCLAD – Presenter: Kristi Nord, MD, Memorial Hospital & Health Care Center - Neurology

Monday, August 10th; 6:00 pm CST

Registration: mavenclad.com/en/events/a4G4A000000DPVrUAO OR 1-877-969-1722

Relationships and Intimacy – Presenters: Meghan Beier, PhD and Kathleen Healey, NP, PhD

Tuesday, August 11th; 7:00 pm - 8:15 pm CDT

Registration: cando-ms.org/multiple-sclerosis-programs/webinar-series OR cando-ms.org