

Interferon b treatment helps multiple sclerosis recovery and survival. That's according to the Interferon b PRISMS study by Dr George Ebers, Division of Neurology, London Health Sciences Centre Ontario in the Lancet (7 November 1998).

(Note: Natalizumab also seems to slow down MS. David Miller at the Institute of Neurology in London has found that monthly injections reduce the number of new MS lesions by 90% compared to those given a placebo treatment. Natalizumab seems to work by preventing immune cells from crossing the blood brain barrier, which is further evidence that white cells are involved in attacking the fatty insulator myelin sheath surrounding normal brain fibres. (New England Journal of Medicine vol 348, p15))

Prof Ludwig Kappos also found the same Interferon b treatment effect in the European Study Group. Both found interferon b-1a reduces clinical relapses in multiple sclerosis, delays the time before there is serious disability and reduces the number of new episodes.

Multiple sclerosis (MS) affects 1.1 million world-wide. It is a progressive, disabling disease of the central nervous system which is incurable. The first interferon study involved 560 people with relapsing-remitting multiple sclerosis, the second consisted of 718 with secondary-progressive MS followed for three years, randomly allocated to placebo and interferon b. Calls are now being made for [governments](#) to make interferon b available immediately for all with multiple sclerosis but it is very expensive.

What is the truth about MS progression?

The answer is that every person is different. However large studies reveal common patterns. MS results from damage to the sheath around nerve fibres (demyelination) in the central nervous system. Typical features are loss of vision (may be partial, patchy and with good recovery), weakness, numbness and changes in mood or personality. The classic features of multiple sclerosis are a sudden event which is obvious, with almost total or apparently complete recovery. We don't know what causes MS.

Relapsing-remitting MS - 85% of patients have one or more episodes followed by complete or partial recovery. Patients are stable between relapses.

Progressive MS - in 15% of multiple sclerosis cases the condition continues to worsen progressively.

Secondary-progressive MS - within ten years, half of those with relapsing-remitting MS experience gradually worsening disability, with or without obvious episodes of further nerve damage.

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