

# November 2019 Newsletter



## Rehabilitation Therapy – Better Living with MS

The goal of MS rehabilitation therapy is to maintain or improve function in those who may be struggling with disability. It is an essential component of MS care. As is the case with MS disease-modifying therapies, rehabilitation doesn't stop the progression of the disease, but it has many benefits and can greatly improve an individual's quality of life. Rehabilitation offers non-drug approaches for treatment however it should be used alongside the MS medications. Rehabilitation specialists can provide education and strategies to address or prevent many complications of MS, such as decreased mobility and independence, fatigue, pain, bladder or bowel dysfunction, trouble swallowing, impaired communication, or problems with thinking and memory (to name a few). Rehabilitation is especially important after a flare to recover as much of one's ability as possible. Depending on symptoms, an individual may only occasionally need rehabilitation therapy or they may require it regularly. In either case, it's important to consider it for MS as early as possible as this can make a big difference in its effectiveness.





Just as people with MS may lose control over some of the muscles involved in walking, some lose control over muscles that control speech. Speech therapy, typically provided by a speech and language pathologist (SLP), can help to retrain these muscles, which will help make speech clearer. This training may also improve swallowing ability, since swallowing involves many of the same muscles used for speaking. A SLP can teach their clients exercises to help improve [breath support](#). In addition, they can provide information and advice regarding devices that can help one interact, such as voice amplification devices, or computer-assisted communications devices. Their goal is to make communication easier and clearer, as well as promote safe swallowing and overall health. Like occupational therapists, some SLPs also evaluate and treat problems with thinking and memory.



As discussed in our [June 2019 newsletter](#), up to 65% of people with MS have problems with aspects of thinking at some point in the course of their disease. This might include difficulty with memory, concentration, organization, problem solving or multitasking. Cognitive therapy offers strategies that may help with these issues. For example, it might include learning to use a smartphone to set reminders, or training to manage more than one task at a time. A number of professionals evaluate and treat these symptoms, including neuropsychologists, OTs and SLPs. While each of these specialties uses different evaluation and treatment strategies, they share the common goal of helping people with MS function better if cognitive changes are an issue.



Counseling plays an important role in rehabilitation therapy for people with MS, caregivers and family members, alike. There's a huge emotional component to living with the disease. Feelings of loss, fear of change or uncertainty about the future are not uncommon. It's important not to face these feelings alone. Individual counseling or participating in a local MS support group can offer effective coping strategies and fellowship. The National MS Society has a number of [resources](#) to help individuals with MS get the emotional and social support that they need to work through these difficult feelings.

People with MS frequently must overcome physical, mental and emotional challenges in order to accomplish daily tasks and achieve long term goals. Living the best life possible with the disease requires perseverance and a commitment to developing new ways of doing things. It's important for people with MS to assemble a healthcare team that includes rehabilitation professionals, when necessary. MS is unpredictable and affects everyone differently. The rehab team can look for and identify problems, set goals, and come up with individualized solutions to maximize function and quality of life. It's important to keep in mind that it may take time to see results from rehabilitation therapy and there may be frustrations along the way. However, many people with MS find it to be effective at reducing any loss of mobility or function they may be experiencing, and the long-term benefits are well worth it.

