# The Difference Between Multiple Sclerosis and Muscular Dystrophy

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## Multiple Sclerosis vs Muscular Dystrophy: the Difference

When I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS) in 2016 and I would share my diagnosis with others, most people immediately thought of muscular dystrophy (MD). Mainly because, in the past, MD received a lot of publicity with the ever-popular Jerry Lewis telethons. He would host hours of television with interviews of MD patients and popular musical guests. You could hear the phones ringing with people pledging to help children diagnosed with MD, and see the operators cheerfully taking those pledges. However, it is important to understand the difference between multiple sclerosis vs muscular dystrophy.

I had only ever heard of MS when a fellow church-goer had been diagnosed. I never really asked her about it, but I did notice she had some difficulty walking. Annette Funicello also brought MS to the forefront when she made her diagnosis public in 1992. She had actually been diagnosed in 1987. The correlation struck me because I used to watch her on the Mickey Mouse Club when I was a little girl. Still, I didn't research or find out about it until I was diagnosed myself.

### What Is Multiple Sclerosis?

The definition of multiples sclerosis is ever-changing. It is believed to be an autoimmune disease of the nervous system. The hallmark of MS is the scarring it leaves in its wake. The antibodies in an autoimmune body mistake healthy cells for foreign ones, and these antibodies launch attacks on the protective covering on our nerve endings, called myelin. As the body tries to heal itself from the self-inflicted attack, it forms many scars (or scleroses), thus the aptly named disease, multiple sclerosis. These scars are most often found on the brain, but also on the spinal cord. Where the scars are found usually dictates the symptoms a person with MS will experience. I have some scars on my brain, but more on my spinal cord which causes my mobility issues, limb numbness, bladder issues and myriad of other problems.

The cause of MS is unknown, but there are some risk factors that may increase the chances of the development of MS (you can learn more about them here):

- Family History
- Age
- Sex
- Smoking
- Climate
- Race
- Some infections
- Having another autoimmune disease

### Symptoms of MS

There are many symptoms of MS that sometimes mimic other chronic illnesses. MS can be difficult to diagnose, so always share any concerns with your healthcare provider. Here are some of the symptoms you may experience with MS:

- Numbness or weakness
- Tingling or the feeling you get when a limb “falls asleep”
- Problems with vision
- Slurred speech
- Fatigue
- Bladder/bowel issues
- Sexual dysfunction

**Treatment for MS**

How MS is treated depends on which type you are diagnosed with. Relapsing/Remitting MS (RRMS) is the most commonly diagnosed type and the one with the most treatment options. The options range from pills to daily injections and intravenous infusions. Because MS is a ‘snowflake’ disease, meaning it is unique to each person, it may take trial and error to find the right one for you.

**What Is Muscular Dystrophy?**

Muscular dystrophy is a group of inherited diseases that affect the muscles. According to the Mayo Clinic, "In muscular dystrophy, abnormal genes (mutations) interfere with the production of proteins needed to form healthy muscle."

There are many different types of MD. The most common types show symptoms in childhood, but some don’t appear until adulthood.

**Symptoms of MD**

- Muscle weakness
- Learning impairment
- Difficulty walking
- Walking on tiptoes (in children)
- Large calf muscles
- Falling often

While it is common to search the internet and self-diagnose, please contact your healthcare provider with any concerns. Combining your knowledge of your own body with the knowledge of an expert will help avoid unnecessary worry.

**What Is the Treatment Course for MD?**

There are many treatments available for MD. Although, like MS, there is no cure; however, the treatments can slow the progression of the disease. The options include:

- Heart medications
- Steroids
- Physical therapy
- Surgery

**Multiple Sclerosis vs Muscular Dystrophy: Takeaway**

While MD and MS are both progressive diseases with no cure, there are still many differences, mostly with how

they affect the body.

- Muscular dystrophy affects the muscles, while multiple sclerosis attacks the nervous system.
- Muscular dystrophy can be fatal, while multiple sclerosis is not. You can die with MS, but not because of it.
- Muscular dystrophy is inherited, while MS is more of a disruption in the cells and is not inherited.
- Lifestyle changes can help you avoid the risk factors of multiple sclerosis. Since muscular dystrophy is inherited, sadly, there is nothing you can do to avoid it.
- Finally, muscular dystrophy is most often diagnosed in childhood, while the average age for diagnosis of multiple sclerosis is 37.

I cannot stress enough to consult your physician with any medical questions or concerns. It can be helpful to get information from someone who is already diagnosed, but each disease is unique to each person, so confirm any suspicions with your doctor.