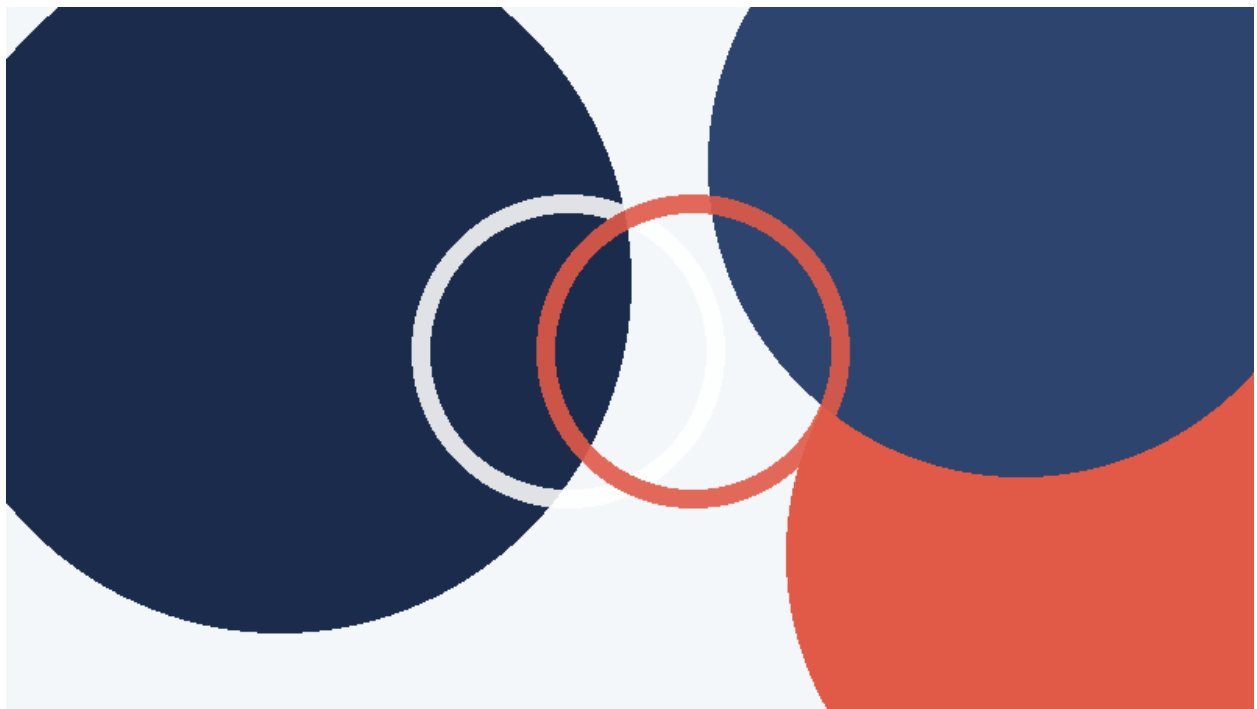


Navigating MS -Marriage, Pregnancy and Intimacy

An Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) Guide on Marriage, Pregnancy and Intimacy.



KEY FOCUS AREAS COVERED IN THIS GUIDE

- **Intimacy & Emotional Connection:** Navigating physical changes, communication techniques, and preserving relational closeness.
- **Family Planning & Pregnancy:** Pre-conception planning, medication management, pregnancy safety, and postnatal support.
- **Marital Dynamics & Caregiving:** Balancing roles, managing fatigue together, and fostering long-term emotional resilience.

Introduction & Core Imperative

- **Breaking the Taboo:** Sexual health and family planning in Multiple Sclerosis (MS) are frequently overlooked due to social taboos. Open dialogue and education are essential for managing these challenges.
- **Prevalence:** Sexual dysfunction affects up to **90%** of individuals living with MS.
- **Key Principle:** Effective, open communication between partners and healthcare providers is central to navigating intimacy and relational dynamics.

2. Gender-Specific Symptom Profiles & Cognitive Strategies

Men

- **Primary Symptoms:** Erectile dysfunction and ejaculatory difficulties.
- **Correlation:** Strongly associated with higher disability scores, leg weakness, and urinary bladder dysfunction.
- **Contributing Factors:** Medications prescribed for MS management can also contribute to dysfunction.

Women

- **Primary Symptoms:** Anorgasmia (difficulty achieving orgasm), reduced vaginal lubrication, and decreased libido.
- **Correlation:** Does *not* necessarily correlate with physical disability levels; individuals with mild disability may still experience severe sexual symptoms.
- **Contributing Factors:** High fatigue levels and specific medication side effects.

Cognitive Strategies for Both Partners

- **Broadening Intimacy:** Redefine sexual activity beyond intercourse to include touch, massaging, kissing, petting, and mutual sensual pleasure.
- **Energy Management:** Schedule intimate activities during peak physical energy times (e.g., morning or mid-day) and take rest breaks as needed.

3. Clinical Symptom Management Matrix

Challenge / Symptom	Recommended Clinical & Practical Interventions
Vaginal Dryness / Pelvic Floor Drying	Use water-based lubricants, moisturisers, and pelvic floor (Kegel) exercises. Vibrators can be used where appropriate.
Anorgasmia	Address underlying fatigue, treat Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA) if present, utilize energy conservation techniques, and review/titrate sedative medications.
Erectile Dysfunction	First-line treatment: Phosphodiesterase-5 inhibitors (e.g., Sildenafil/Viagra) or constriction bands/rings. Advanced options via Urologist: Vacuum erection devices, intraurethral suppositories, or penile injections.

Urinary Incontinence during Intimacy	Empty the bladder prior to intimacy. If post-void residual volume is >100 ml, perform self-catheterisation. If <100 ml, medications like Mirabegron can be evaluated.
Fatigue	Incorporate aerobic exercise, yoga, weight management, and review routine medications for sedative side effects.

4. Marriage, Pregnancy & Genetics

- **Genetics:** MS is **not** a direct genetic disease. However, carrying the **HLA-DRB1** genotype increases susceptibility, whereas **HLA-A02** is associated with a reduced risk.
- **Family Planning & Pre-Conception:**
 - If disease activity has been stable (no relapses for 12 months), conceived pregnancies are generally safe under medical supervision.
 - **Mild MS:** Interferons and Glatiramer Acetate (GA) are generally considered safe options.
 - **Moderate to Aggressive MS:** High-efficacy therapies (e.g., Rituximab, Ocrelizumab, Ofatumumab) require clear preconception timelines and protocols under neurological supervision.
- **Disclosure:** Maintain open communication with future partners and families without concealing health information, encouraging reliance on validated public literature.

5. Holistic Lifestyle & Quality of Life Pillars **Environmental & Habitual Adjustments:** Smoking cessation, avoiding Vitamin D deficiency, controlling hypertension, and maintaining healthy weight.

- **Infection Prevention & Mental Health:** Reduce exposure to viral infections (e.g., EBV), manage stress, and seek support for anxiety, depression, and mood swings.
- **Gut Health:** Maintain a consistent, balanced diet to foster a healthy gut microbiome.

Complied by – PwMS Puja Chadha & PwMS Dimple k (inputs taken from webinar conducted by Dr. Jaidip Rai Chaudhari on Impact of MS on Marriage, Pregnancy and Intimacy.)

