

Black Patients With Multiple Sclerosis Have Worse Disease

African Americans with multiple sclerosis face faster disease progression and poorer outcomes compared with their white peers.

July 12, 2021 By [Kate Ferguson](#)

Recent incidence reports suggest that [multiple sclerosis](#) (MS) is increasing among African Americans. Now, new [findings published in the journal Neurology](#) support mounting evidence that African Americans also experience more severe consequences from the autoimmune disease, according to the [National Multiple Sclerosis Society](#).

For the study, researchers reviewed data from 1,214 Black participants and 7,530 white individuals with MS. Scientists also considered the socioeconomic status—as determined by ZIP codes—of 288 African Americans and 1,046 Caucasians in the group.

In addition, investigators checked the results of special cognitive and physical tests administered to the participants.

Results showed that, on average, Black people with MS tallied five fewer points than their white counterparts on the cognitive test. African Americans were slower on tests for walking and tasks that involved manual dexterity. Researchers also noted that the brain scans of African Americans showed, on average, more lesions compared with their white peers.

Interestingly, among white participants slower [cognitive function](#), walking and dexterity were linked with a lower household income. However, for Black participants, lower income was connected only with diminished dexterity.

To explain why Black people with MS experience greater disability, researchers suggested that future inquiries should assess the role played by other social factors, such as [systemic racism](#).

“These results also reinforce the need for more diverse clinical trials and research focusing on treatment strategies specifically for Black people to identify whether certain therapies or more aggressive early treatment could help slow down disability over time,” concluded Lana Zhovtis Ryerson, MD, of NYU Langone Health in New York City, one of the study’s authors.

To learn more about dissimilarities in how Black and white people with MS respond to therapy,

read "[Reaction to Multiple Sclerosis Treatment Differs Between Black and White Patients.](#)"

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