

Coping styles may influence illness outcomes

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A recent study from Polish researchers has explored the association between how people feel about their MS, their self-esteem, and their ability to self-manage their illness.

Published in the journal [*Acta Neurologica Scandinavica*](#), the researchers assessed 210 people with MS using questionnaires to measure their levels of self-esteem (feelings of self-worth); self-efficacy (a person's beliefs on their capability in challenging situations); and illness self-management. Illness self-management is a person's ability to cope with sticking with a treatment (adherence), being involved in clinical decision making, seeking

out information about their illness, and maintaining social relationships.

The study participants who had a higher level of self-efficacy, a more long-term view of MS management, and a perception that treatment can control progression of the disease, all tended to have higher levels of self-management. These factors were important regardless of the stage or duration of illness, or the level of disability.

This type of research is important for understanding factors that may influence long-term outcomes of MS and particularly treatment related outcomes. For example, most MS medications are likely to be less effective if they are not taken correctly or regularly, therefore, if a person with MS stops taking their medication or misses doses because they are not coping well with managing their disease, then the treatment is likely to be less effective. By studying factors associated with a person's illness self-management, researchers can identify ways to encourage better treatment adherence and improve long-term illness outcomes and quality of life.

This research has parallels with other recent research in Australia. A webinar presented by Professor Marita McCabe, Director of the newly established Institute for Health and Ageing at the Australian Catholic University, in Melbourne, discussed how people who use emotion-focused coping styles, involving a degree of wishful thinking ("I wish this never happened to me") and often resulting in high levels of distress, may have more difficulty adjusting to an MS diagnosis than people who use problem-focused coping, which uses active strategies in looking for solutions.

In another webinar, Dr Cynthia Honan from the University of NSW spoke about her work which found that how a person perceives their cognitive ability (thinking and memory skills) has more influence than their actual cognitive ability on their work performance and their likelihood of remaining in work.

This research highlights the importance of self-esteem and active coping in the management of the challenges MS can present.