The Biology of Multiple Sclerosis
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Preface

Multiple sclerosis (MS) is the most common debilitating neurological disease in relatively young people (less than 40 years old) in developed countries; in these countries it has a prevalence of around 1 in 800. It is a disease characterised by focal lymphocytic infiltration of the brain and spinal cord leading to damage to myelin, and eventually also to axons. The most common clinical course of the disease is relapsing and remitting, leading to a progressive course, but in about 10% of patients the disease is initially progressive (primary progressive MS). In both forms of the disease, there is usually progressive neurological disability, but patients may survive for many years.

Investigation of the cause and characteristics of MS has been the subject of intensive research effort; although at least one partially successful treatment has been developed, the cause of MS is still unknown. A large body of evidence suggests that autoimmunity is involved. Studies of the epidemiology and genetics of MS suggest an interaction between an environmental factor and genetic susceptibility.

The clinical aspects of MS have been well covered in other publications. Our aim here is to review the scientific literature that has been published on the biology of MS, and to provide a scientific overview.