

Employment for working age people with MS

Young 2026: Employment status in people with multiple sclerosis: Profile, dynamic changes and determinants over time



What was the study about?

Multiple sclerosis (MS) is often diagnosed during people's working lives, and many people with MS want to stay in employment for as long as possible (there are many health benefits to employment). This study looked at how employment changes over time for people with MS in the UK, and which factors make changes in work more likely.



What did the study involve?

Many participants in the long-running TONiC-MS study returned multiple annual packs but this analysis concerns 1,865 adults with MS aged 20–60 years who were followed for almost two years on average. They completed questionnaires about their health, symptoms, mood, and work situation. The analysis looked at three types of work changes:

- **Work disability:** stopping work for any reason.
- **Work discontinuity:** retiring early due to ill health.
- **Work drift:** moving from full-time to part-time work.

The researchers also looked at whether people ever returned to work or increased their working hours.



What was found?

At the start, **about half (55%)** of the group were in paid work. Overall, of those who were working, most stayed in work over the following two years, but some stopped working, retired early due to ill health, or move from full-time to part-time work. However, changes in work status were not only oneway. Some people returned to work or moved from part-time to full-time roles. While there were some people who worked less or not at all, there were others who became employed or increased their hours.

- Balancing out the numbers, there were small but steady increases each year in:
 - **Work disability** (4% per year),
 - **Early medical retirement** (3.1% per year),
 - **Work drift from full-time to part-time** (1.8% per year).

The study found that older age, higher levels of disability, and problems coping at work (known as “work instability”) increased the risk of stopping work. Early medical retirement was more common in people with secondary progressive MS, cognitive difficulties, additional health conditions, and those not using disease modifying treatments (DMT). Women were more likely than men to reduce their working hours. The numbers of people moving from unemployment to employment were not large enough to reliably examine influencing factors for increasing work.



Why this matters?

Work is important for well-being and the issues of reducing paid hours and effect of DMT have not been well studied. The findings of return to work are encouraging and argue for targeted help to support more people to return. The study also showed that simple information already available in routine MS care—such as age, disability level, time off sick, and a short work-instability questionnaire—can help **identify people who are at high risk of losing work**. Use of this tool in MS clinics could help identify people who may benefit from early support, workplace adjustments, or vocational rehabilitation, helping more people with MS to stay in employment for longer.