Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis

Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) or Lou Gehrig's Disease, is a rare neurological condition. Symptoms of ALS disease include muscle weakness and degeneration. Over time, this affliction results in "wasting" where the disease progresses until it eventually causes death. Lou Gehrig's Disease is most likely to get diagnosed in people aged 40 - 60, with people in their 50's being the most prevalent age group getting diagnosed with the affliction. In some cases, people in their 30's can find themselves battling this progressive, terminal illness.

Causes of ALS

At the time of this writing, there was no known cause of ALS. Factors that are believed to contribute to the outbreak of this disease include genetic disposition, as well as exposure to toxins and chemicals in the environment, an infection caused by viral agents, and premature aging.

This progressive disease has four stages.

Stage One is the initial onset of the disease. Common symptoms that patients with Stage One ALS experience muscle spasms, muscle cramps, muscle shrinkage, twitching, and muscle weakness. Older patients may also have troubles with maintaining balance, suffer from fatigue, or may start losing their ability to grip things.

In Stage Two, the symptoms of the disease start worsening. Patients with Stage Two ALS experience muscle pain and paralysis. Joints start becoming rigid, making normal activities, such as standing up difficult. Other problems like weakness, swelling, and dry mouth, and difficulty eating and swallowing are also frequent in Stage Two ALS patients.

In Stage Three, ALS patients health condition significantly declines. Mobility is restricted. Complete paralyzation of voluntary muscles, as well as difficulty with involuntary muscles responsible for breathing, are common. Patients might also experience pain, headaches, and dizziness. The help of a full-time caregiver is likely to be required, particularly as sufferers enter the fourth, and final, stage of the illness.

Stage Four ALS is the terminal stage of the illness. Involuntary muscles associated with breathing and heart rate could fail. Other possibilities that could result in the death of the ALS patient include cardiac arrest or choking as a result of muscle failure.

Treating ALS

When treating ALS, a variety of therapies are available, dependent on which stage of the disease the person getting treated is experiencing.

1. **Physical Therapy -** Physical therapy is helpful to restore strength and function to affected parts of the body.

2. **Glutamate Blockers and Muscle Relaxers** - These may get prescribed to help manage pain, muscle tension, and discomfort. In early 2017, a new drug called Radicova got approved for the treatment of ALS. This is the first ALS drug therapy in twenty-two years.
3. **Other Treatments** - Other treatments for ALS include Tracheotomy if a breathing tube needs to get inserted and Gastrostomy for feeding and to drain excess fluids.

ALS patients receive care from a variety of healthcare professionals including Primary Care Physicians, Respiratory Therapists, Neurologists, Speech Therapists, Pulmonologists, Occupational Therapists, and Palliative Care Providers.

If you or someone you love is experiencing symptoms of ALS, make an appointment with your Primary Care Physician or GP as soon as possible to discuss the issue.