

Dystonia

Dystonia is a disorder that affects movement, causing a person's muscles contract uncontrollably. When these contractions occur, the muscle group or affected body part twists involuntarily and results in repetitive movements or abnormal postures. Dystonia is an affliction that can affect a single muscle, a complete muscle group, or the patient's entire body. This illness affects around 1% of the population, with people over the age of 60 being more prone to the disease than other age groups.

What Causes Dystonia?

In most diagnosed cases of dystonia, there is not one specific cause found. It's believed that Dystonia is related to issues in the basal ganglia, the part of the brain that controls muscle contractions. People who have this health issue got it one of two ways. Acquired dystonia or primary dystonia.

Acquired dystonia occurs as a result of damage to the basal ganglia caused by carbon monoxide poisoning, brain trauma, infections, reactions to drugs, tumors, oxygen deprivation, or lead poisoning.

Primary dystonia also referred to as idiopathic dystonia, is genetically passed from parents to children. Some carriers of the gene do not suffer from the disease. Symptoms in those who have it can widely vary among family members.

What are Dystonia Symptoms?

Dystonia symptoms can be very mild to severe. Further, this health issue can affect different parts of the body. The symptoms of dystonia often progress in stages.

Some early onset symptoms of dystonia:

- Blinking uncontrollably
- A leg that is lazy or drags
- Foot cramping
- Difficulties with speech
- Involuntary pulling of the neck

Fatigue and stress can intensify symptoms. Many individuals diagnosed with dystonia report experiencing exhaustion and pain as a result of chronic muscle contractions.

While this health condition affects primarily older adults, if the symptoms of dystonia happen in childhood, they'll first appear in the hands or feet. Soon these symptoms begin occurring in other parts of the body. As sufferers reach adolescence, the progression rate slows.

When dystonia emerges in early adulthood, the upper body is likely to show symptoms first and slowly progresses. The onset of Dystonia in early adulthood are either segmental or focal. Dystonia can affect either one specific part of the body or two or more adjacent body parts.

Treating Dystonia

There are multiple dystonia treatments available to sufferers. Your doctor or care team will evaluate your condition to decide which course of treatment is best, based on the severity and type of dystonia.

Botox - or botulinum toxin - is one treatment used to manage dystonia. It is the same substance regularly used in cosmetic anti-aging procedures to minimize wrinkles and fine lines. Once Botox is injected into the affected muscles, it blocks acetylcholine - the chemical responsible for causing muscle contractions. For best results, these injections should get done every three or four months.

Medications can get used to help control and manage symptoms and muscle contractions as a result of dystonia. Additionally, physical therapy, stress management and speech therapy can all prove helpful in treating this progressive disease.

If you or someone you love is exhibiting symptoms of Dystonia, contact your Primary Care Physician or GP for further tests.