

Muscular dystrophy explained

Muscular dystrophy is the name given to a group of neuromuscular disorders which cause progressive and selective degeneration and weakness of voluntary muscles. There are approximately 60 separate diseases which can be classed as neuromuscular disorders, all of which involve the progressive and irreversible wasting of muscle tissue.

Neuromuscular diseases are divided into three main groups:

- **Dystrophies** are characterised by muscle wasting from within the muscles themselves. A person affected by a muscular dystrophy disorder has a mutation within their genetic makeup that prevents the maintenance and repair of muscle tissue.
- **Atrophies** are characterised by muscle wasting caused by a disorder of the nerve system of the spinal cord, which influences our ability to use muscles effectively.
- **Neuropathies** are characterised by muscle wasting caused by a disorder of the nerve system within the peripheral parts of the body, which also influences our ability to use muscles.
People affected by atrophy or neuropathy disorders are unable to use their muscles due to problems associated with their nervous system, rather a problem within than the muscles themselves.

Symptoms and support needs vary

Symptoms of the various neuromuscular disorders often vary. People affected by muscular dystrophy have different degrees of independence, mobility and carer needs. These needs will vary within each disease and between diseases.

Diseases may have different causes

Each of the 60-odd muscular dystrophy diseases has a separate cause. For instance, Duchenne MD is caused by a genetic defect, which results in the body's failure to produce the dystrophin protein. Friedreich's ataxia is caused by the degeneration of nerve tissue in the spinal cord and of nerves that extend to the peripheral areas, such as the arms and legs.

There is no cure for any of the 60 neuromuscular disorders. Medical research is continuing in the hope of finding a cure. However, the discovery of a cure for one disorder may not necessarily have immediate application in curing another disorder.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Muscular Dystrophy Association Tel. (03) 9320 9555

Things to remember

- Muscular dystrophies are inherited muscle diseases, which lead to progressive weakness and irreversible wasting of muscle tissue.
- There is no cure for any of the 60 neuromuscular disorders.
- The symptoms of neuromuscular disorder may be different.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Muscular Dystrophy Association

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