

ALS Facts

Types of ALS

- Sporadic ALS is the most common form of ALS.
- Familial ALS is inherited and is responsible for five to 10 per cent of cases.
- Bulbar ALS refers to cases where the muscles for speaking, swallowing or breathing are the first to be affected.

Early Signs

- Early symptoms can include tripping, dropping things, slurred or “thick” speech, muscle cramping, weakening and twitching.
- Early symptoms may seem vague and are often mistaken for normal signs of aging.

ALS Destroys Motor Neurons

- The brain sends messages to the voluntary muscles through motor neurons.
- ALS does not affect the eye muscles, heart, bladder, bowel or sexual muscles.

Symptoms & Progression

- Symptoms and the order in which they occur vary from one person to another.
- The rate of muscle loss can vary significantly from person to person.
- As the disease progresses, muscles of the trunk of the body are affected and will likely involve the muscles required for breathing.

Signs of Lower Upper Neuron Degeneration

- Muscle stiffness or rigidity.
- Decreased ability to control laughing or crying.
- Increased or hyperactive reflexes.

Diagnosis

- ALS can be difficult to diagnose in the early stages because symptoms may mimic other conditions.
- There is no ALS-specific diagnostic test except for some familial cases. Other diseases and conditions must be ruled out first.
- Specific gene mutations can be identified to test for some familial cases of ALS (i.e., SOD1 mutation).
- Doctors use physical examination, electromyography (EMG) test, blood tests, MRIs and other tests to search for diseases similar to ALS.
- Many non-specialists are less familiar recognizing and treating ALS. Patients are often sent to an ALS specialist to confirm a diagnosis.
- People diagnosed with ALS should be fully informed about the disease, treatments, current research trials and available support services by the ALS Society of Alberta.

Signs of Lower Motor Neuron Degeneration

- Muscle weakness and atrophy.
- Involuntary twitching of muscle fibres.
- Muscle cramps.
- Weakened reflexes.
- Decreased muscle tone.
- Difficulty swallowing.
- Inability to articulate speech.

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