# Olivopontocerebellar Atrophy

Olivopontocerebellar atrophy (OPCA) refers to a group of ataxias which are characterized by progressive neurological degeneration. This affects the cerebellum, the pons and the inferior olives. OPCA may be classified based on clinical, genetic or neuropathological findings, so there are many classifications of the disorder. Among them, severity and age of onset varies widely.

## SYMPTOMS

The symptoms of OPCA differ from person to person. Most patients experience:

- Difficulty with balance and coordination of the legs and arms (*ataxia*).
- Slurred speech (*dysarthria*).

Other symptoms may include:

- Muscle spasms or weakness and stiffness of the muscles.
- Numbness or tingling of the hands or feet.
- Shaking (*tremor*) of the hand or arm.
- Reduced or slowed movements.
- Loss of thinking and/or memory skills.
- Difficulty controlling the bladder or bowels.
- Feeling faint when standing up.
- Fatigue.
- Trouble with sleep.

Generally symptoms of OPCA begin in mid-adult life. They progress slowly over the course of many years.

## TREATMENT

There is no specific treatment for OPCA. Caregivers may try different medications to treat the ataxia, tremor and rigidity that are associated with the disorder. Other treatments are directed at specific symptoms. Medication may improve:

- Stiffness.
- Spasms.
- Sleep disorders.
- Depression.
- Tremor.

A physical therapist may be helpful in:

- Establishing a routine of exercise and stretching.
- Obtaining devices or appliances to assist in walking and other daily activities.

## WHAT WILL HAPPEN

There is no cure for OPCA. The disorder is slowly progressive. Death usually occurs approximately 20 years after onset.

## RESEARCH BEING DONE

The NINDS supports and conducts a broad range of basic and clinical research on cerebellar degeneration. The work is aimed at finding the cause(s) of OPCA and ways to treat, cure, and, ultimately prevent the disease. There has been great progress recently since the genes for several of the hereditary forms of OPCA have been found.

**Research is continually being done to learn more about this problem.**

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