Myoclonus

Myoclonus is a term that refers to brief, involuntary twitching of a muscle or a group of muscles. It describes a symptom and, generally, is not a diagnosis of a disease. The myoclonic twitches or jerks are usually caused by sudden muscle contractions. They also can result from brief lapses of contraction. Myoclonic jerks may occur:

- Alone or in sequence.
- In a pattern or without pattern.
- Infrequently or many times each minute.

Most often myoclonus is one of several symptoms in a wide variety of nervous system disorders such as:

- Multiple sclerosis.
- Parkinson's disease.
- Alzheimer's disease.
- Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease.

Familiar examples of normal myoclonus include:

- Hiccups and jerks.
- "Sleep starts" that some people have while drifting off to sleep.

Severe cases can severely limit a person's ability to:

- Eat.
- Talk.
- Walk.

Myoclonic jerks commonly occur in individuals with epilepsy.

The most common types of myoclonus include:

- Action.
- Cortical reflex.
- Essential.
- Palatal.
- Progressive myoclonus epilepsy.
- Reticular reflex.
- Sleep.
- Stimulus-sensitive.

TREATMENT

Treatment for myoclonus consists of medicines that may help reduce symptoms. These drugs (many of which are also used to treat epilepsy) include:

- Barbiturates.
- Clonazepam.
- Phenytoin.
- Primidone.
- Sodium valproate.

The complex origins of myoclonus may require the use of multiple drugs.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN

Although myoclonus is not a life-threatening condition, it may result in serious, debilitating problems.

RESEARCH BEING DONE

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

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