Motor Neuron Diseases

Motor neuron diseases (MNDs) are progressive, degenerative disorders. They affect nerves in the upper or lower parts of the body. Some of the diseases are inherited. But others may be acquired. Common MNDs include amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), progressive muscular atrophy, and postpolio syndrome.

CAUSES

The cause(s) of most MNDs are not known. But the following factors may be involved:

- Environmental.
- Viral.
- Toxic.
- Genetic.

SYMPTOMS

Generally, MNDs strike in middle age. Symptoms may include:

- Difficulty swallowing.
- Impaired gait.
- Limb weakness.
- Facial weakness.
- Slurred speech.
- Muscle cramps.
- In the later stages of these diseases, respiration may be affected.

TREATMENT

There is no cure, nor standard treatment, for MNDs. Treatment is symptomatic and supportive. Physical therapy, drug therapy, and assistive devices may help some individuals.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN

The prognosis for individuals with these disorders varies depending on the type of MND. Some types, such as ALS, are fatal.

RESEARCH BEING DONE

The NINDS supports a broad range of studies aimed at:

- Discovering the cause(s) of MNDs.
- Finding better treatments.
- Preventing and curing the disorders.

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

Provided by: The National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke

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