



TIPS

for Living With Dystonia

Dystonia is a chronic and often progressive neurologic movement disorder that causes muscles to contract involuntarily, resulting in abnormal movements or postures. Although dystonia is not life-threatening, the disorder can cause tendons to shorten, thus leading to permanent physical deformities. Following the tips below can help if you have dystonia.

Increase your sense of awareness. Become an active participant in your treatment regimen. Learn as much as you can about your disorder, investigate all treatment options, and make informed decisions while considering the input of your medical team.

Know the various treatment options. Different treatment options are available for people with dystonia, such as levodopa, botulinum toxin injections, anticholinergic drugs, and muscle relaxants such as clonazepam and diazepam. Speak with your doctor about the right treatment option for you.

Try physical therapy. Physical therapy can help you manage the symptoms of dystonia by improving your flexibility. Physical therapists may also help identify which movements worsen spasms and which ones relieve spasms.

Consider surgery. Surgery may be an option for people with severe dystonia who do not respond to other methods of treatment. For example, surgical approaches include deep brain stimulation, selective peripheral denervation, thalamotomy, and pallidotomy.

Be aware of your limitations. Have patience with yourself when things do not go the way that you would like them to. It may take more experience before you develop the skills needed to cope with your dystonia.

Seek support as needed. Find settings where you can talk about your experiences and feelings and be understood. Make use of support groups and resources. Also, find a neurologic team of people who have expertise in dystonia and are empathic.

Find ways to help others. If you develop a new way of coping with your dystonia, try sharing it with others who have dystonia. By helping others, you may also help yourself adjust to your dystonia.

Identify anxiety and depression. Be mindful of symptoms of anxiety and depression. Anxiety and depression can impact quality of life and the severity of dystonia symptoms. They can also interfere with your motivation and ability to implement other coping strategies.

This page is part of an ongoing series of practical tips for patients with neurologic disorders. If you have compiled clinically relevant tips that you wish to share, please contact the editor at info@neurologyreviews.com.

Tips for Patients are available for download at www.neurologyreviews.com.

