

- **Early-onset generalised dystonia.**  
Symptoms start in childhood or adolescence (13-19 years old) and often begins with dystonia of a leg but spreads to other areas.
- **Dopa-responsive dystonia** is a dystonia that responds well to dopamine, an important chemical messenger in the brain.
- **Myoclonus dystonia** where quick, jerky movements of mostly the arms are seen in association with dystonia.

## How is Dystonia Diagnosed

A specialist neurologist (a neurologist with a special interest in Movement Disorders) will assess the symptoms, perform a neurological examination and take a detailed history for a possible diagnosis of dystonia.

## What treatments are available?

Treatments depend on the type of dystonia and include medications, botulinum toxin and surgery. For further information refer to our web site or the appropriate, relevant brochures. Dystonia can affect the individual physically, emotionally, socially, at work and in daily living activities. It often causes depression and anxiety. These health symptoms can have as big an impact as the physical symptoms and should be discussed with your neurologist, GP or mental health professional.

Help us help people with dystonia by becoming a member, assisting with fundraising or joining/starting up a support group.

Go to our website or contact the association directly for information.

Dystonia Network of Australia Inc. (DNA)  
Registered Charity ABN: 66 348 949 649

9 Denman Parade Leura  
NSW Australia 2780

Tel/Fax: (02) 4784 3368  
Email: [info@dystonia.org.au](mailto:info@dystonia.org.au)  
[www.dystonia.org.au](http://www.dystonia.org.au)

### Disclaimer

The information contained in this leaflet is of a general nature only. Please consult your Movement Disorder specialist or neurologist if you have specific questions regarding your condition.



# What is Dystonia?



# What is Dystonia

Dystonia is a neurological movement disorder that makes it difficult for people to control their muscles. It can cause abnormal twisting or positions in part(s) of the body along with spasms or tremors. In some people the postures may be fixed or locked in position and in others pain can be the main symptom. Dystonia can affect almost any part of the body.

Dystonia affects children and adults of any age and has many different causes. In some people symptoms may improve or even disappear. However, the symptoms may return after a period of time. There is no known cure but there are treatments that help with the symptoms. There are many forms of dystonia and many conditions or diseases may include dystonia as part of the symptoms.

## What causes Dystonia?

Dystonia has many causes. It may be genetic as in early-onset generalised dystonia, dopa-responsive dystonia and myoclonus dystonia. It can also be acquired (where there is a known cause), from a brain injury as in hemidystonia or cerebral palsy,

from certain medications that affect the brain or as a result of stroke or trauma. However, often the cause of dystonia is not known (this is called idiopathic dystonia).

Where a cause is not found it is usually accepted that there is a problem with the way certain areas of the brain, such as the basal ganglia and the cerebellum, control movement.

## Common types of Dystonia

Dystonia can be described as **focal**, where only one area of the body is affected, **segmental**, two or more connected areas are affected, **hemidystonia**, one side of the body only is affected, **multifocal** where two or more unconnected body regions are affected and **generalised**, where most or all of the body is affected.

**Focal dystonias** can occur at any age but mostly occur in adults. They include:

- **cervical dystonia** - dystonia of the neck causing painful spasms, postures or positions
- **blepharospasm** - dystonia of the eyelids causing the eyes to blink or close often
- **spasmodic dysphonia** - dystonia of the larynx or voice box leading to strained, whispering or shaky speech

- **writer's or musician's cramp** – causing difficulty with writing or playing a musical instrument
- **oromandibular dystonia** - dystonia of the face, jaw, mouth and tongue with difficulty in opening or closing the mouth affecting chewing and speech and causing movements the person cannot control

**Segmental dystonias** include Meige's syndrome which is a mix of two forms of dystonia, blepharospasm and oromandibular dystonia that could involve the voice, or combinations such as writer's cramp and cervical dystonia.

Hemidystonia affects one side of the body. This type of dystonia is usually caused by a brain injury.

Multifocal dystonia is not common, where unconnected areas in the body are affected, for example, spasmodic dysphonia may be seen with writer's cramp.

**Generalised dystonia** is the least common form of dystonia but the most disabling and occurs mostly in children and adolescents (13-19 year olds). In this type of dystonia the trunk (central or main part of the body) is involved and two or more other areas of the body. The following types of generalised dystonia are the most common. Please refer to our website for more information.