Spasms with Multiple Sclerosis (MS)

Spasms or muscle stiffness is a common symptom of MS. Most often one set of muscles contracts while another set relaxes. With MS, there is a change in how nerve impulses flow. This causes a loss of coordinated movement called spasms. Spasms often affect the muscles of the legs. They may occur in the arms, but this is not common.

About Muscle Spasms from MS

Spasms can feel like a twinge of muscle tightness to a painful muscle contraction. You may feel clumsy or very tired from the extra effort needed to move.

- Muscle spasms may come and go, especially at night.
- Spasms can be increased by infection, temperature changes, or skin changes such as an ingrown toenail or pressure sore.
- Stress, anxiety or even tight clothing can affect muscle spasms.
- Severe spasms can lead to complications such as a frozen joint or pressure sores when movement is limited or restricted.

Treatment of Muscle Spasms

Treatment may include exercise, physical therapy, devices, medicines or surgery. Your doctor may have you first treat any factors that may be increasing your spasms such as a bladder infection or constipation. You may also be encouraged to practice good skin care and avoid temperature changes.
Physical Therapy
A physical therapist can help with an exercise program at home. Exercises such as stretching and range of motion can be helpful.

Devices such as braces and splints can help with movement and positions. For example, an ankle-foot brace may be ordered by your doctor to keep your ankle and foot stable. This brace helps with walking and may help prevent a frozen joint. Have your brace or splint fitted by a professional.

Medicines
Medicines may be used to manage spasms. Medicine is not a cure and will not increase muscle strength. Your doctor may recommend taking more than one medicine to control your spasms.

- Baclofen (Lioresal) is a muscle relaxer that works at the spinal cord. Your dose will be increased slowly until you have the most benefit with the least side effects. The most common side effects are drowsiness and muscle weakness. Do not stop taking your medicine without talking to your doctor first.
  - For those who cannot tolerate a high dose of oral baclofen, a small pump can be implanted under the skin by the abdomen. This lets a computer-controlled dose of the medicine be given to the spinal cord directly and continuously through a small tube under the skin.
- Tizanidine (Zanaflex) is a muscle relaxer, which calms spasms. Your dose will be increased slowly. The most common side effect is drowsiness. It may also cause a drop in blood pressure resulting in dizziness upon standing.
- Botulinum toxin (Botox) can be given an injection into affected muscles, which helps spasms. The treatments must be repeated every 3 to 6 months. This medicine is not approved by the FDA for MS treatment.

Talk to your doctor if you have any questions.

Surgery
Surgery is often used as a later treatment strategy. In some cases, the spinal nerve may be cut or tendons from muscles may be altered.

Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have any questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.