

# HEALTH EDUCATION CORNER



## MOTOR NEURONE DISEASE (MND)

### SUMMARY

Motor neurone disease (MND) is also called amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) and Lou Gehrig's disease. MND often begins with weakness of the muscles in the hands or feet. It eventually leads to generalised paralysis. People with MND need help with daily activities and have a life expectancy of one to five years after their diagnosis.

### Symptoms of motor neurone disease (MND)

The physical effects of motor neurone disease can include:

- Muscle weakness or wasting – often first noticed in the hands or feet
- Difficulty swallowing or slurred speech
- Muscle twitching
- Cramps
- Emotional changeability
- Fatigue
- Weight loss.

### Causes of MND

The causes of MND are unknown, but worldwide research includes studies on:

- Viruses, toxins, genetic factors and immune factors
- Nerve growth factors and chemicals that control nerve cells and allow them to communicate with each other
- Growth, repair and ageing of motor neurons.

Familial (hereditary) MND accounts for about five to 10 per cent of cases. Several gene mutations have been identified since 1993, and current research aims to identify further genes linked to MND.

## **Effects of MND**

People who have MND will have:

- A potential to develop generalised paralysis (paralysis of both sides of the body)
- Loss of speech and difficulty swallowing
- A dependence on others for all aspects of day-to-day activity
- An average life expectancy of one to five years after diagnosis.

## **Impact of MND on carers**

As MND progresses, there will be:

- Rapidly changing physical ability of the person with MND and increasing assistance required of the carer
- Increasing levels of support required for the carer and the person living with MND
- Emotional demands of caring and being cared for.

## **There is no cure yet for MND**

The drug riluzole has been demonstrated in clinical trials to show a slight extension of life expectancy, and works best in conjunction with support from a team of health professionals. Riluzole is available on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.

Costly and unproven therapies are sometimes recommended by well-meaning people. You should seek professional advice before trying unproven therapies.

## **Coping with the effects of MND**

The Motor Neurone Disease Association can help people to cope with the physical and emotional effects of the diagnosis by providing:

- Information about MND and support services via telephone, email, in person, printed and via the MND Victoria website
- Regional advisor service
- Home visits and assessment of the needs of people living with MND
- Help to connect to services that people need, such as attendant care, nursing, speech pathology, occupational therapy and physiotherapy
- Equipment loan service, or referral to other agencies for equipment
- Volunteer programs.

## **Where to get help**

- Your doctor
- A specialist neurologist
  
- Motor Neurone Disease Association Tel. (03) 9830 2122      (03) 9830 2122 FREE  
or 1800 806 632      1800 806 632 FREE
  
- Department of Human Services, Disability Services Tel. 1800 783 783      1800 783  
783 FREE or TTY 1800 008 149.
- Centrelink Tel. 132 717 (Disability, Sickness and Carers)

## **Source**

The information in this article has been sourced from the Better Health Channel website.