

# Introduction to Muscular Dystrophy

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Muscular dystrophy is the term used to describe a group of diseases of the muscles. With muscular dystrophy the muscles become weak and can waste away. There are over 20 different kinds of muscular dystrophies.

## Who Does Muscular Dystrophy Affect?

The number of people affected by muscular dystrophy depends on the specific type. For example, approximately one child in 4,000 will have Spinal Muscular Atrophy. Approximately one in 3,000 will have Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy.

## What Causes Muscular Dystrophy?

The different types of muscular dystrophy have different causes. Some have genetic causes. A virus or illness causes some. Others have unknown causes.

## How is Muscular Dystrophy Diagnosed?

To diagnose muscular dystrophy a doctor will take a detailed history, perform a thorough physical examination, and conduct specific tests. One of these tests is an electromyogram (EMG), which measures the electrical activity of the muscles. If a diagnosis cannot be made based on these tests, a muscle biopsy is often performed.

These tests usually give the diagnosis in about 80% of the patients. However, even with new tests approximately 15%-20% of patients will go undiagnosed.

## Can Muscular Dystrophy Be Prevented?

Polio can be prevented by ensuring that the patient gets the Polio vaccination. Genetic information and counseling can give people who are planning on having children some insight as to whether they are at risk to have children with this genetic disease. People can also learn about what medications or toxins may lead to damage of the nerves. However, there are also muscular dystrophies that cannot be prevented because their causes are unknown.

## **What Health Problems Are Associated with Muscle Diseases?**

Some of the health problems that people with muscle diseases can experience are problems with breathing and/or heart problems. Many patients can develop curvature of the spine (scoliosis) or muscle contractions leading to the need for surgery.

## **How Is Muscular Dystrophy Treated?**

The treatment depends upon the specific cause of muscle weakness. However, physical therapy and occupational therapy are often used.

## **What Does the Future Hold for Someone with Muscular Dystrophy?**

In some cases a person with a muscle disease will get worse over time, and may have a shorter life expectancy than someone without the disease. However, some of the muscle diseases do not affect life expectancy at all.



## **Muscular Dystrophy Resources**

Muscular Dystrophy Association

[www.mda.org](http://www.mda.org)

Mayo Clinic

[www.mayoclinic.org](http://www.mayoclinic.org)

Centers for Disease Control

[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

National Library of Medicine

[www.nlm.nih.gov](http://www.nlm.nih.gov)

National Institute for Neurological Disorders and Stroke

[www.ninds.nih.gov](http://www.ninds.nih.gov)