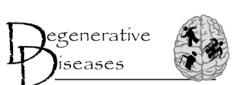


FACT SHEET



Physical Therapy and Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis

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SPECIAL
INTEREST
GROUP

Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) or Lou Gehrig's disease is a disease that damages nerves. This damage can cause problems with things such as walking, grasping, swallowing, and breathing. Over time people with ALS become very weak in most of their muscles. Physical therapy can play an important role in the care of people with ALS.

How Can Physical Therapy (PT) help?

A physical therapist will:

- talk with you about how ALS is affecting your daily activities.
- teach specific exercises to help keep muscles as strong as possible. It is also common for some parts of the body to become stiff when muscle strength becomes unbalanced. A PT can suggest exercises to keep good motion in all areas of the body.
- give advice to help prevent injuries, pain, and fatigue from overworking weak muscles.
- suggest equipment that can help when activities like walking become hard on a person with ALS. These might be a cane, wheeled walker, braces, a wheelchair, and other equipment to help with mobility.
- teach caregivers how to help people with ALS to keep moving. Because this disease worsens over time, people with ALS will need more help moving in and out of bed, onto the toilet, and walking or moving about. PTs can teach caregivers the best way to help a person with ALS with their daily activities. Pressure sores may occur if people with ALS are not able to change their position to decrease pressure on their skin. In these cases, PTs can work with patients, caregivers, and families to make sure that the appropriate wheelchairs and bed positioning are being used to help prevent pressure sores from happening.

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A person can consult a physical therapist to discuss possible benefits. It is recommended that people with ALS see a PT for an evaluation as soon as possible after they are diagnosed so that they can maximize their function and mobility throughout the entire course of the disease.