

## What is spasticity?

Spasticity is abnormal muscle stiffness, usually in a group or groups of muscles. It is due to interrupted signals coming from the brain and spinal cord following an injury (e.g. head/spinal injury, a stroke), or disease (e.g. MS).

This stiffness can cause common symptoms, for example:

- muscle tightness
- difficulties in movement
- muscle tiredness
- muscle spasms
- lack of control

The tightness can make hygiene difficult and cause pain. It could also affect your walking and lead to falls. However, some spasticity can be useful. For example, some people use the muscle stiffness to help them stand.

## What makes spasticity worse?

Many things influence spasticity, and you will find that some things will improve your symptoms, whilst others make them worse. A major factor in spasticity is the speed at which you move. A quick movement will make the muscle stiffness or spasms worse. Moving at the right speed for you can easily control this.

Other common factors which tend to affect spasticity include:

- pain
- cold
- fatigue
- anxiety/stress
- infections (eg urinary infection)
- constipation
- strenuous activities
- pressure sores

However, this is not an exhaustive list and some of these may not affect your symptoms at all.

## Management of spasticity

Spasticity is usually best managed with a combination of different treatments including:

- exercise
- physiotherapy
- positioning
- stretching
- splinting

All of these can be supplemented by drug therapy, and sometimes surgery.

It is very important to realise that the most effective management is achieved through a 24 hour approach. Things that need to be considered are:

- how you sit in your chair and whether it offers appropriate support
- how you get in and out of your chair
- how you walk
- what stretches you do
- what position you adopt in bed
- appropriate use of splints

It is useful to monitor what happens to your spasticity during the day and specifically during these activities, so that the person looking after your care can best advise how to make caring for you easier, in the long term.

## Medication

There are many different types of medication for the treatment of spasticity and these can be administered in a variety of ways:

- *Tablets* which work on the entire body (e.g. Baclofen, Tizanidine)
- *Injections* which can be specifically targeted to problem muscles and groups of muscles (e.g. botulinum toxin, peripheral nerve block)
- *Implanted device*, this is generally used with patients whose spasticity is not adequately controlled by medication and the above measures alone

## Exercise

Spasticity can cause joints to stiffen up, and so it is important that you and your carers take as much responsibility as possible for the management of your symptoms. This includes movement and exercise. However, although it is important to exercise, you also need to do the right type of exercise. As previously mentioned, effortful or fast activities can increase tone and so there are some types of exercise which may not be appropriate for you to do.

Your therapist can guide you in exercises tailored to you, but it is up to you to carry these out. They may take the form of a simple stretching programme for you, or your carer to do.

Doing these exercises should become part of your routine.

**Remember, the management of your spasticity will be more effective, the more you or your carers do for yourself**

## West Midlands Rehabilitation Centre

**For more information, please contact:  
Clinic Co-ordinator for Spasticity  
Tel 0121 466 3229**

## Patient Information

## Spasticity and its management