



Muscle weakness





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What is muscle weakness?



- **Muscle weakness, or myasthenia** is a decrease in strength in one or more muscles. It is a common symptom of muscular, neurological and metabolic disorders.
- Muscular diseases, such as muscular dystrophy and dermatomyositis (disorder characterized by muscle inflammation), are common causes of muscle weakness.
- Other common causes include neurological disorders, such as Guillain-Barre syndrome (an autoimmune nerve disorder), amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease), stroke, and even a pinched nerve
- Metabolic disorders, such as Addison's disease and hyperthyroidism, can lead to weakness in one muscle or a group of muscles.
- Depending on the cause, weakness may develop in one or more muscles or all muscles accompanied by pain, atrophy, cramping etc
- In some cases, muscle weakness that happens suddenly, especially on one side of the body, can be a sign of stroke. If it occurs along with severe abdominal pain, it may be a symptom of botulism. Medical treatment should be sought for without further delay



What causes muscle weakness?



- Muscle weakness may be caused due to various reasons like muscular, metabolic, neurological disorders:
- The metabolic causes of muscle weakness are:
 - Addison’s disease (decreased production of hormones by the adrenal glands)
 - Hyperparathyroidism (overactive parathyroid glands)
 - Hyperthyroidism (overactive thyroid)
 - Hypokalemia (low potassium)
 - Hyponatremia (low sodium)
- Muscle weakness may have neurological causes including:
 - Bell’s palsy (swollen or inflamed nerve that controls facial muscles)
 - Cerebral palsy (group of conditions affecting the brain and nervous system functions)
 - Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease (inherited disorder affecting the peripheral nerves)
 - Guillain-Barre syndrome (autoimmune nerve disorder)
 - Multiple sclerosis (disease that affects the brain and spinal cord, causing weakness, coordination and balance difficulties, and other problems)
 - Nerve entrapment or compression, such as of the ulnar nerve in the arm
 - Stroke



What causes muscle weakness?

- **Muscle weakness may have muscular disease causes including:**
 - Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease, a severe neuromuscular disease that causes muscle weakness and disability)
 - Dermatomyositis (condition characterized by muscle inflammation and skin rash)
 - Muscular dystrophy (inherited disorder that causes a progressive loss of muscle tissue and muscle weakness)
- **Muscle weakness may be due to toxins including:**
 - Botulism (serious food poisoning caused by Clostridium botulinum bacterium)
 - Insecticide ingestion
 - Nerve gas exposure
 - Paralytic shellfish poisoning
- **Muscle weakness may have other causes including:**
 - Anaemia (low red blood cell count)
 - Overuse injury (overuse of a muscle)
 - Polymyositis (widespread inflammation and weakness of muscles)

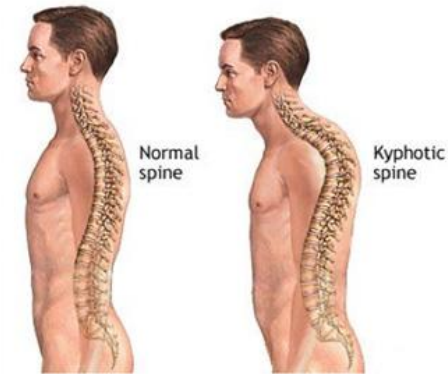
Probable symptoms



- **Muscle weakness may accompany other symptoms affecting the muscles including:**
 - Burning feeling
 - Frequent episodes of falling
 - Loss of muscle coordination
 - Muscle spasms
 - Pain
 - Paralysis
 - Pins-and-needles (prickling) sensation
 - Twitching
- **Muscle weakness may accompany symptoms that are related to other body systems including:**
 - Blurred or double vision
 - Difficulty with speaking and swallowing
 - Diarrhoea
 - Fainting or change in level of consciousness or lethargy
 - Fatigue & headache
 - Fever
 - Gradual difficulty walking and speaking, memory loss
 - Nausea with or without vomiting
 - Protruding eyes, unexplained weight loss, heat intolerance, perspiration, and goiter
 - Weakness, numbness or tingling, vision problems, unsteady walk, fatigue, and depression
 - Unexplained weight loss

Complications

- **Inability to walk.** Some people with muscular dystrophy eventually need to use a wheelchair/stick/walker to move.
- **Shortening of muscles or tendons around joints (contractures).** Contractures can further limit mobility.
- **Breathing problems.** Progressive weakness can affect the muscles associated with breathing. People with muscular dystrophy may eventually need to use a breathing assistance device (ventilator), initially at night but possibly also in the day.
- **Curved spine (scoliosis).** Weakened muscles may be unable to hold the spine straight.
- **Heart problems.** Muscular dystrophy can reduce the efficiency of the heart muscle.
- **Swallowing problems.** If the muscles involved with swallowing are affected, nutritional problems and aspiration pneumonia may develop. Feeding tubes may be an option.



Treatment



- Treatment generally involves a multifaceted plan that addresses the cause, helps to build strength, decreases the risk of developing complications, such as muscle atrophy, and helps a person to live a normal life
- Treatment generally includes appropriate periods of rest, good hydration and nutrition and regular medical care. Rehabilitation, physical therapy, occupational therapy, and a regular program of exercise may be recommended. Orthopaedic splints, canes, crutches and/or a walker may be needed to help support weak muscles and improve mobility in some cases.
- Corticosteroid medications may be prescribed to reduce inflammation of the nervous system in some conditions
- Treatment of muscle weakness caused by anaemia may involve blood transfusions and treatment of the underlying conditions causing anaemia





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