AMYOTROPHIC LATERAL SCLEROSIS SOCIETY OF CANADA
SOCIÉTÉ CANADIENNE DE LA SCLÉROSE LATÉRALE AMYOTROPHIQUE
3000 Steeles Avenue East, Suite 200, Markham, Ontario L3R 4T9
Tel. 905-248-2052 • Fax: 905-248-2019 • Toll Free:1 800 267-4257 • www.als.ca

ALS FACTS

Fact Sheet

ALS Destroys Motor Neurons

- The brain sends messages to the voluntary muscles through motor neurons.
- ALS does not affect the eye muscles, heart, bladder, bowel, or sexual muscles.

Types of ALS

- Sporadic ALS is the most common form of ALS.
- Familial ALS is inherited and is responsible for five to 10 per cent of cases.
- Bulbar ALS refers to cases where the muscles for speaking, swallowing or breathing are the first to be affected.

Early Signs

- Early symptoms can include tripping, dropping things, slurred or "thick" speech, muscle cramping, weakening and twitching.
- Early symptoms may seem vague and are often mistaken for normal signs of aging.

Signs of Lower Motor Neuron Degeneration

- Muscle weakness and atrophy.
- Involuntary twitching of muscle fibres.
- Muscle cramps.
- Weakened reflexes.
- Decreased muscle tone.
- Difficulty swallowing.
- Inability to articulate speech.
- Shortness of breath at rest.

Signs of Upper Motor Neuron Degeneration

- Muscle stiffness, or rigidity.
- Decreased ability to control laughing or crying.
- Increased or hyperactive reflexes.

Symptoms/Progression

- Symptoms and the order in which they occur vary from one person to another.
- The rate of muscle loss can vary significantly from person to person.
- As the disease progresses, muscles of the trunk of the body are affected and will likely involve the muscles required for breathing.

Diagnosis

- ALS can be difficult to diagnose in the early stages because symptoms may mimic other conditions.
- There is no ALS-specific diagnostic test except for some familial cases. Other diseases and conditions must be ruled out first.
- Specific gene mutations can be identified to test for some familial cases of ALS (i.e., SOD1 mutation).
- Doctors use physical examination, electromyography (EMG) test, blood tests, MRIs, and other tests to search for diseases similar to ALS.
- Many non-specialists are less familiar recognizing and treating ALS. Patients are often sent to an ALS specialist to confirm a diagnosis.
- People diagnosed with ALS should be fully informed about the disease, treatments, current research trials and available support services by the ALS Society in their province. A list of ALS societies is available at www.als.ca/_units.
- Find an ALS doctor in your province at www.als.ca/if_you_have_als/health_clinics.aspx.