

Understanding Spasticity

Helpful Tips and Resources – March 2021



What is Spasticity?

Spasticity is a common condition experienced by many stroke survivors. It is caused by hyperactive reflexes activated by the stroke. It manifests as increased muscle tone and abnormal muscle contractions in the upper and/or lower limbs. Patients with spasticity may also experience abnormal posture or limb positioning. Spasticity may also be seen in patients who have sustained a spinal cord injury or traumatic brain injury, as well as in conditions like multiple sclerosis and ALS (Lou Gehrig's Disease), among others.

What is the Treatment?

Spasticity does not always require treatment. In fact, spasticity is thought to help maintain muscle tone in weak muscles. Some are also able to use spasticity to their advantage. Examples of this are provoking spasms to bend the arm or close the hand. Indications for spasticity treatment include:

- Spasticity causing pain or difficulty sleeping.
- Spasticity causing functional issues (ex: difficulty walking, reaching, transferring, positioning).
- Spasticity causing difficulty with hygiene (ex: perineal care, hand hygiene, skin folds).

There are many treatments for spasticity. The mainstay of management is stretching to help maintain range of motion and prevent joint contractures (immovable joints). In some cases special braces, splinting, or casting may be recommended. Medications may help with spasticity as well. Many medications effective in treating spasticity have the potential to cause fatigue but are usually well-tolerated after a period of adjustment. Some medications require periodic blood tests.

Spasticity treatment requires an individualized approach. Speak with your doctor about which treatments may be right for you. All treatment options should be used as a complement to a daily stretching and range of motion program.

Source: <https://lioresal.com/hcp/severe-spasticity/presentation-of-severe-spasticity/>

About Dr. Joshua Rae

Joshua Rae, MD is a Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation (PM&R) physician at Kaiser Permanente in Sacramento. He completed his internship at Kaiser Permanente in Oakland followed by residency training at Stanford Hospitals and Clinics. During training, he had the opportunity to practice in a wide variety of settings including Stanford Medical Center, The Palo Alto VA and Santa Clara Valley Medical Center. He specializes in neurological rehabilitation, non-operative spine care, and amputee care. His personal interests include fitness, nutrition, food and travel.

Common appearance of spasticity



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