

Dystonia of the Face: This may include intermittent facial spasms, fixed postures, or downward pulling of one side of the mouth. Symptoms may come and go, with normal functioning of the facial muscles in between episodes.

Blepharospasm: Individuals may experience sudden onset of blinking and/or sustained closure of the eyes. Eye symptoms may affect both eyes or occur with spasms on one side of the face.

Fixed Dystonia: Functional dystonia often manifests as a fixed posture, typically in a limb, hand, or neck/shoulder. It should be noted that dystonia acquired from other secondary causes, such as an injury, may also be fixed. Functional dystonia with pain and dysautonomic symptoms (difference in skin temperature, skin color, sweating, or swelling) may suggest complex regional pain syndrome.

Episodic Dystonia: Functional dystonia commonly occurs in episodes or attacks, which is also a hallmark of movement disorders called paroxysmal dyskinesias. Episodes of functional dystonia can produce movements in the torso and limbs, and may last varying lengths of time in the same patient, from seconds to days. The predominant movement symptoms may change from one episode to the next. Episodes of functional dystonia may be preceded by triggers that are not consistent with triggers associated with paroxysmal dyskinesias.

What is DMRF Canada?

The Dystonia Medical Research Foundation (DMRF) Canada is a charitable organization that funds medical research toward a cure, promotes awareness and education, and supports the well being of affected individuals and families.

To learn more about dystonia and DMRF Canada, contact:

DMRF Canada

PO Box 1009 Stn Toronto Dom
Toronto ON M5K 1P2

Phone: 416.488.6974

Toll free: 800.361.8061

www.dystoniacanada.org

Email: info@dystoniacanada.org

Connect with DMRF Canada on
Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

For more in-depth information, visit
www.dystoniacanada.org/about-dystonia/functional-dystonia

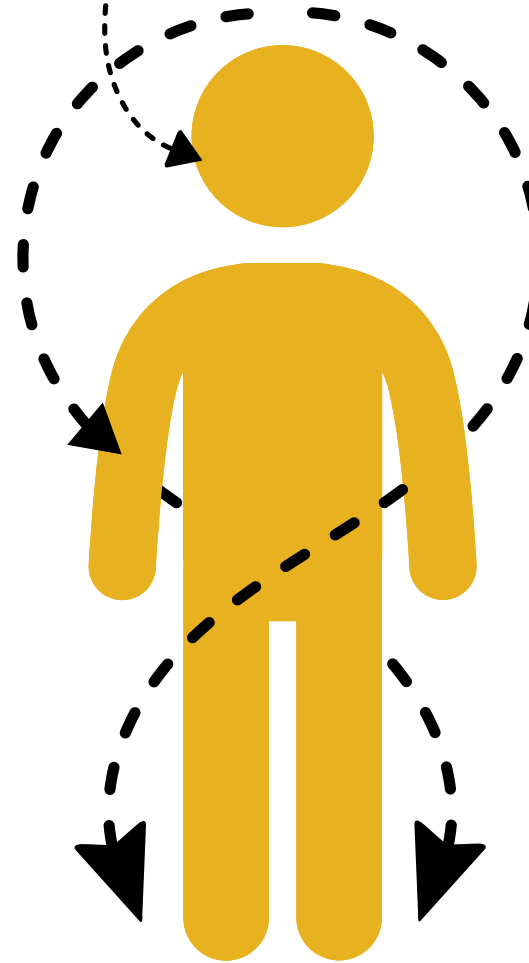


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Functional Dystonia



What is Functional Dystonia?

Dystonia is a neurological disorder that causes intense, involuntary muscle contractions. These muscle spasms make it difficult for patients to move their bodies freely and control their body movements. There are many types of dystonia and numerous causes.

In **functional dystonia**, there is abnormal, unintended movement or positioning of the body due to the nervous system not working properly. Functional dystonia can cause movement symptoms in the face, neck, shoulder, torso, and/or limbs.

Functional dystonia is often seen in individuals with psychiatric disorders and/or exposure to psychological stressors. The start of symptoms is often preceded by an injury, illness, or emotionally stressful event.

What are the Symptoms of Functional Dystonia?

Functional dystonia can affect different areas of the body. Functional dystonia may share some characteristics with dystonia due to other causes, but also has distinguishing features. Common expressions of functional dystonia include:

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serving all dystonia-affected persons
déservant toutes personnes atteintes de dystonie

What are Functional Movement Disorders?

Functional dystonia belongs to a category of disorders called functional movement disorders. Many people with functional movement disorders experience a mix of motor symptoms including dystonia, tremor, myoclonus, gait disorders, and tics. They may also experience pain, weakness, sensory symptoms, non-epileptic seizures, and other functional neurological symptoms.

Functional movement disorders are common, representing up to 25% of patients treated in movement disorder clinics. Functional movement disorders affect men and women as well as children.

Possible Indicators of Functional Dystonia

- Sudden symptom onset
- Minor injury preceding symptom onset
- Symptoms are varying and unpredictable across time
- Symptoms contradict hallmark features of other neurological disorders
- Symptoms are lessened with distraction
- Spontaneous remissions and relapse
- Abnormal movements and pain are inconsistent with extent of injury
- Psychiatric symptoms
- Exposure to psychological stressors
- Many additional medically unexplained symptoms

What is the Cause?

Many researchers believe functional movement disorders occur due to an underlying vulnerability in the brain combined with an external trigger, though the mechanism is not yet fully understood. Research suggests that the process in the brain that helps a person sense whether a movement is voluntary or involuntary becomes disordered, resulting in unintentional movements or postures. These disorders are caused by changes in how the brain functions, not damage to the structures of the nervous system.

How is Functional Dystonia Diagnosed?

Diagnosing functional dystonia can be difficult and should be left to movement disorder neurologists and psychiatrists with expertise in diverse neurological diseases.

The diagnosis of functional dystonia is made on the positive observation of the clinical signs in the neurological examination, not solely by ruling out other disorders or the presence of psychological or psychiatric factors. Although psychological and psychiatric factors often contribute to functional dystonia, these signs are not always present.

Functional Movement Disorders...

- Are real and disabling disorders.
- Are not deliberate. Patients are not making up symptoms.
- Do not mean an affected individual is “crazy” or “hysterical.”
- Are due to dysfunction of the nervous system, not neurological damage or disease.
- Are treatable.

Living with Functional Dystonia

Living well with a functional movement disorder is possible. In some cases, treatment can dramatically reduce or eliminate symptoms.

Individuals affected by functional dystonia are strongly encouraged to:

- Seek evaluation from a neurologist with special training in movement disorders.
- Seek expert mental health professionals to diagnose and treat possible underlying emotional or mental disorders.
- Learn about functional movement disorders and treatment options.
- Develop a support system of support groups, online resources, friends, and family.
- Explore complementary therapies for overall wellness.
- Get active within the patient advocacy community.

What Healthcare Professionals Treat Functional Dystonia?

Many individuals with functional dystonia have complex healthcare needs, so a team of medical experts may be appropriate. The team may include a movement disorder neurologist, psychiatrist, psychotherapist, physical therapist, and additional healthcare providers.

What Treatments are Available?

Therapy for functional movement disorders must be tailored to the needs of the individual. The goal of treatment is to lessen symptoms and improve function by helping the brain override the mechanism that is causing the unintentional movements or postures.

Treatment may require physical and/or occupational therapy, cognitive behavior therapy, and/or oral medications such as antidepressants.

What Support is Available?

Dystonia Medical Research Foundation (DMRF) Canada can provide educational resources, self-help opportunities, contact with others, volunteer opportunities, and connection to the greater dystonia community.