



Post-Polio Syndrome

Post-polio syndrome is a progressive disease of the nerves and muscles that affects between 25% and 40% of survivors of paralytic polio.

Q: What is Post-Polio Syndrome (PPS)?

PPS is a disease that affects the body's muscles and nerves, causing progressive weakness. It develops in people at least a decade after their partial or full recovery from polio.

Q: What are the symptoms of PPS?

Symptoms of PPS develop gradually over time and commonly include muscle weakness, increasing fatigue, decreasing endurance, and muscle and/or joint pain. Less common symptoms that may emerge include loss of muscle mass and difficulty swallowing and/or breathing. Sleep disorders, including sleep apnea, may be another sign of the disease. Symptoms can affect one side of the body more than the other.

Q: Who is at risk for developing PPS?

Anyone who has recovered, fully or partially, from polio can develop PPS. People who experienced more severe cases of polio, were older when they contracted the disease, and/or have some degree of disability, face a higher risk of developing PPS.

Q: How is PPS diagnosed?

PPS is typically diagnosed by physiatrists (rehabilitative doctors who treat medical conditions related to the brain, bones, nerves and muscles) or neurologists. These doctors will review symptoms, perform a physical exam to test muscle strength, and record health history, including a past diagnosis of polio. In addition, blood tests may be conducted, along with MRI, CT scans, electromyography (to measure the electrical activity of the muscles) and muscle biopsy (to identify damage in the muscle cells).

Q: What is the treatment for PPS?

While there is no cure for PPS, symptoms can be managed to help maintain quality of life. Non-fatiguing exercises, such as walking, swimming or cycling, along with strength training, can help maintain muscle strength and improve stability to prevent falls. Yoga and breathing exercises may help with stress. Physical, occupational and speech therapies can also help individuals navigate and adapt to symptoms as they develop.

Assistive devices will be an important part of managing symptoms. The use of walkers, scooters or wheelchairs can help prevent exhaustion and conserve energy. For individuals with breathing difficulties, the supplemental use of a BiPAP machine or, eventually, mechanical ventilation, may be necessary.

Q: What are some lifestyle modifications that might help?

Energy conservation is an important rehabilitation strategy. Adding rest periods into your day to ensure you are not overexerting your muscles will be helpful. The goal is to prevent muscles from becoming fatigued and causing more nerve damage. Maintaining a healthy weight will also be important for heart health. Avoid falls by wearing properly fitted shoes, removing clutter from the floor, and using handrails when going up or down stairs.

Q: Where can I find other information and support for living with PPS?

Along with physical symptoms, the emergence of PPS decades after a bout with polio might cause emotional distress: connecting with others who are living with the disease can provide a much-needed sense of community. Post-Polio Health International (PHI) is an organization that provides education and support for thousands of polio survivors and ventilator users; its resources include a helpline, quarterly newsletter and support groups across the country. Visit the resources section below for contact information.

Sources: American Academy of Medicine and Physical Rehabilitation, Post-Polio Health International, Cedar Sinai, Cleveland Clinic.

Need to talk to someone?

Our Information Specialists are available to answer your questions.

Call toll-free at 1-800-539-7309 Mon-Fri, 7 am - 8 pm EST.

Or schedule a call or ask a question online at

<https://www.ChristopherReeve.org/Ask>.

Resources for PPS:

The American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Physiatrist Directory

<https://www.aapmr.org>

Post-Polio Health International

<https://post-polio.org/>

50 Crestwood Executive Center

St. Louis, MO 63126

Phone: 314-534-0475

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