

## Spasticity

### What is spasticity?

After an injury to the brain or spinal cord, or as a result of certain diseases, a person may develop **spasticity**. Spasticity is an unplanned or uncontrolled muscle movement (contraction). These movements can range from mild stiffness in certain muscles, to painful uncontrolled muscle spasms. The spasms or contractions may come at rest or as result of certain movements.

Some examples of spasticity include:

- The bouncing or jumping of a leg when a position is shifted while sitting
- The unplanned bending of an elbow while walking or working on a difficult activity
- A sudden straightening or stiffening of the trunk when attempting to stand up from a chair or turn in bed

Spasticity can be painful and can keep a person awake at night. Sometimes spasticity can cause problems walking, working, or moving between surfaces.

### Can spasticity be helpful?

- Sometimes a person can learn to trigger his or her spasticity to help with movements that are otherwise difficult.
- An increase in spasticity can also help alert a person that there is a problem that cannot be felt, such as a pressure sore, an injury, or a bladder infection.

### How is spasticity treated?

It is important to complete any stretching programs that are prescribed by your doctor or therapist, so that you are able to maintain motion in your muscles and joints. Some people are able to decrease spasticity by moving slowly through positions that are likely to cause a contraction. Others are able to calm the spasms by using firm pressure through the joint. Your therapist will teach you these techniques, if they are right for you.

There are medications that can be used to decrease troublesome spasticity. Some are medications taken by mouth. Some are injected into the problem muscle. Finally, there are surgical alternatives in severe cases. Together with your input, your doctor can help determine what approach is right for you.

If you have any additional questions about spasticity, please ask your therapist, nurse or doctor.