



## Muscular Dystrophy

Muscular Dystrophy is a genetic disorder that gradually weakens the body's muscles. It is caused by incorrect or missing genetic information that prevents the body from making the proteins it needs to build and maintain healthy muscles. A child who is diagnosed with Muscular Dystrophy gradually loses the ability to do things like walk, sit upright, breathe easily, and move their arms and hands. This increasing weakness can lead to other health problems. In some cases, Muscular Dystrophy starts causing muscle problems in infancy, though there are many children who follow a normal pattern of development during their first few years of life and only display warning signs later on, and in some, the symptoms do not appear until adulthood.

### **Some of these signs include:**

- Stumbling
- Waddling
- Difficulty climbing stairs
- Toe-walking (walk on the toes without the heels hitting the floor)

There are several major forms of Muscular Dystrophy, which can affect a child's muscles with different levels of severity. The most common, and most severe, form of the disease is called **Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy**. It only affects males, although females can carry the gene. In cases of Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy, symptoms usually begin to appear around age 5, as the pelvic muscles begin to weaken. Most children with this form of Muscular Dystrophy need to use a wheelchair by age 12. Over time, their muscles weaken in the shoulders, back, arms, and legs. Eventually, the respiratory muscles are affected, and a ventilator is required to assist breathing. Children who have Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy typically have a life span of about 20 years. Although most kids with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy have average intelligence, about one third of them experience learning disabilities and a small number of them have mental retardation.

### **Other forms of Muscular Dystrophy include:**

- Becker Muscular Dystrophy
- Myotonic Dystrophy (or Steinert's Disease)
- Limb-Girdle Muscular Dystrophy
- Facioscapulohumeral Muscular Dystrophy

There is no cure for Muscular Dystrophy, but researchers are quickly learning more about how to prevent and treat the condition. Doctors are also working on improving muscle and joint function, and slowing muscle deterioration so that children, teens, and adults with Muscular Dystrophy can live as actively and independently as possible.