



Polio Survivors' Page

POST-POLIO SYMPTOMS & EFFECTS: A BRIEF GUIDE

The past few years have seen a great deal of research devoted to what are generally referred to as "the late effects of polio." This research continues; its pace accelerated. The symptoms and examples listed here are known or suspected to be associated with post-polio.

Not every one will apply to any individual. There are many variables, including your age, degree of disability, and how severe the polio was. These symptoms are, however, a useful guide and beginning point for **assessing** one's own life, seeking appropriate medical treatment, and perhaps making necessary changes in lifestyle.

Known or suspected post-polio problems tend to fall into four main categories. They are:

1. unaccustomed fatigue;
2. joint and/or muscle pain;
3. muscle weakness and/or loss of muscle use; and
4. respiratory problems.

UNACCUSTOMED FATIGUE

- Marked fatigue after moderate exercise or activity is common in post-polios; fatigue can indicate muscle overuse.

JOINT AND/OR MUSCLE PAIN

- More common new musculoskeletal problems in post-polios include osteoarthritis of spine and peripheral joints, scoliosis, bursitis, tendonitis, osteoporosis, myofascial pain syndrome, foot and toe deformities, carpal tunnel syndrome, chronic pain from strain to back and neck muscles. These symptoms in post-polios generally result from longstanding muscle weakness and imbalance; they are not merely part of the normal aging process.

- Chronic strain on joints used in compensatory ways, e.g. weight bearing with upper extremities, can lead to premature degenerative osteoarthritis.

- Osteoporosis of spine and long bones is very common in more severely disabled post-polios. Lone bone fractures may occur with minimal stress.

- Generalized pain in the spine and extremities is very common in post-polios.

- A non-localized "flu-like" aching in muscles is frequent in post-polios.

- Pains in the lower back are common, often caused by movements used to compensate for weak hip muscles; this transfers weight to small facet joints at the back of the vertebra, which are not designed to handle such stress.

MUSCLE WEAKNESS AND LOSS OF MUSCLE USE

- Muscles most commonly affected in post-polios are those that recovered well from the initial attack and have been used strenuously since. Common manifestations are: new muscle weakness, increased weakness or pain, generalized fatigue and weakness, post-exercise weakness and/or pain.
- Post-polios work 2-3 times as hard as normal to accomplish the same activity. The added strain may result in overuse damage.
- Early symptoms of overuse before lasting muscle weakness occurs are: post-exercise transient fatigue, post-exercise transient weakness, pain in specific muscles after exercise, or muscle twitching.
- Weak abdominal muscles tend to foster chronic back strain and injury.
- Post-polios have less muscle reserve, and may need more time to resume normal activity after surgery or severe illness.

RESPIRATORY PROBLEMS

- Combined deterioration of respiratory muscles--from polio AND aging--may necessitate the use of breathing aids.
- Symptoms of failing respiratory reserve can be insomnia, restless sleep, nightmares, morning headache or confusion, shallow breathing patterns, breathlessness even during speaking. A combination of these symptoms requires expert evaluation.
- Post-polios with severe respiratory impairments can develop sleep apnea.

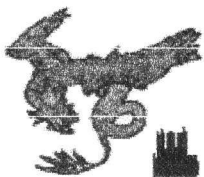
Compiled by the Post-Polio League for Information and Outreach

Sources:

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Document Reference: <URL:<http://www.eskimo.com/~dempt/ppse.htm>>

Last modification: 26th December 1997