SYMPTOM

Movement - uncontrolled or slow

Uncontrolled or slow movement includes shaking, jerking, twisting, or difficulty starting and carrying out movements.

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE
Shaking, jerking, twisting, or movements that feel unusually slow

WHERE IT IS FELT
Hands, arms, legs, face, jaw, or whole body

MOST COMMON CAUSES
Stress or fatigue, medicine effects, essential tremor

WHEN IT IS URGENT
Sudden onset with weakness, confusion, or trouble speaking

USUALLY LASTS
Minutes to years, depending on the cause

SEE A DOCTOR IF
It persists, worsens, or interferes with daily activities

Overview

Movement can become uncontrolled, unusually slow, or both. Uncontrolled movement may appear as shaking, jerking, repeated facial movements, twisting, or muscle spasms. Slow movement can make it difficult to begin walking, turn over in bed, button clothing, or complete other familiar tasks.

These symptoms are sometimes called movement disorders, but the symptom alone does not identify a specific condition. Stress, fatigue, medicines, and several health conditions can affect movement.

Some changes are brief and harmless. Others need medical assessment, especially when they are new, getting worse, or affecting balance, speech, eating, or daily activities.

What it may feel or look like

Uncontrolled movement can take several forms. A tremor is rhythmic shaking, often in the hands, head, jaw, or voice. Jerks are sudden, brief movements. Dystonia causes muscles to tighten and may pull part of the body into an unusual position. Tics are repeated movements or

sounds that may be difficult to resist.

Some people develop restless, flowing movements of the face, tongue, trunk, or limbs. These can occur as a side effect of certain medicines and are sometimes called dyskinesia .

Slow movement is known medically as bradykinesia . It is different from simply feeling tired. Movements may become smaller or take longer than expected. Walking may involve short steps, reduced arm swinging, or difficulty getting started. Handwriting may become smaller, and facial expression or blinking may decrease.

You may notice the movement only during an activity, while holding a position, or when resting. It may affect one area or several parts of the body.

Common causes

Common causes include stress, anxiety, lack of sleep, physical exhaustion, low blood sugar from missing meals, and high caffeine intake. These factors can make a normal slight tremor more noticeable.

Essential tremor is another common cause of shaking. It usually affects the hands during activities such as holding a cup or writing. It may also affect the head or voice. It is not the same condition as Parkinson's disease.

Medicines can cause shaking, stiffness, restlessness, slow movement, muscle spasms, or repeated facial and tongue movements. Possible triggers include some medicines used for nausea, mood disorders, psychosis, asthma, epilepsy, or attention difficulties. Do not stop a prescribed medicine suddenly unless a healthcare professional tells you to.

Less common causes include Parkinson's disease and related conditions, thyroid problems, abnormal levels of certain salts or minerals in the blood, liver or kidney disease, and inherited movement disorders. Nerve or brain conditions may also cause tics, dystonia, jerking, or poor coordination.

Urgent causes include stroke, severe infection affecting the brain, a seizure, head injury, or a serious reaction to medicine. These usually cause other sudden or severe symptoms as well.

When to seek medical care

Call emergency services if movement changes begin suddenly with any of these symptoms:

These signs can indicate a stroke, seizure emergency, serious injury, or another condition requiring immediate assessment. Do not drive yourself.

Seek same-day medical advice for a new movement problem that is rapidly worsening, started after a new medicine or dose change, or occurs with fever, marked stiffness, agitation, or unusual sleepiness.

Arrange a routine appointment if the movement lasts, keeps returning, becomes more noticeable, or interferes with eating, writing, walking, work, sleep, or personal care. You should also book an appointment if slow movement is accompanied by ongoing stiffness, balance problems, or falls.

- Weakness or numbness on one side
- A drooping face or difficulty speaking
- Severe confusion, collapse, or loss of consciousness
- A seizure that does not stop, or repeated seizures without recovery
- Trouble breathing or swallowing
- Severe headache, especially after a head injury

How the cause is found

A healthcare professional will ask when the movement began, which body parts are affected, and whether it happens at rest or during activity. They may ask about stress, sleep, caffeine, alcohol, recent illness, and family history.

Bring a list of prescribed medicines, non-prescription products, and supplements. Include medicines you recently started, stopped, or changed. A short video recorded safely at home can be useful if the movement comes and goes.

The examination may assess muscle strength, stiffness, coordination, reflexes, balance, walking, handwriting, and eye or facial movements. Blood tests may check thyroid function, blood sugar, liver or kidney function, or mineral levels. Brain imaging or referral to a neurologist may be needed when the findings suggest a problem involving the brain or nerves.

Treatment and self-care

Treatment depends on the type and cause of the movement. A medicine may be adjusted when it is contributing, but changes should be made with the prescriber. Other treatments can include medicines for a particular movement pattern, physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, or treatment of an underlying condition.

While waiting for assessment, it may help to:

Avoid using alcohol to control a tremor. Its effect is temporary, and regular use can create other health risks.

If movement affects driving, cooking, using machinery, or climbing stairs, pause those activities until you can do them safely.

- Keep regular meals and sleep times
- Reduce caffeine if it makes shaking worse
- Record when symptoms happen and what you were doing
- Use covered cups or easy-grip utensils if spilling is a problem
- Remove trip hazards if movement is slow or balance is affected

What to expect

A movement caused by stress, fatigue, illness, or a temporary medicine effect may improve when the trigger settles. Some movement conditions are long-lasting but can often be managed to reduce symptoms and protect independence.

The pattern over time helps identify the cause. Keep track of whether the movement is stable, spreading, becoming more frequent, or affecting new activities. Follow-up is important if symptoms change, even if earlier tests were normal.

Common questions

Is shaking always Parkinson's disease?

No. Stress, caffeine, medicines, essential tremor, thyroid problems, and other conditions can cause shaking. The timing and pattern of the tremor help distinguish possible causes.

Can anxiety cause uncontrolled movement?

Anxiety can increase shaking, muscle tension, tics, and restlessness. However, a persistent or worsening movement should not automatically be attributed to anxiety.

Should I stop a medicine that may be causing this?

Do not stop it on your own. Some medicines can cause problems if stopped suddenly. Contact the prescriber promptly, especially if symptoms began after starting or changing a medicine.

Can slow movement be normal ageing?

People may become somewhat slower with age, but a clear change in walking, dressing, writing, facial expression, or balance deserves assessment.

Sources

- National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke. Tremor
- National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke. Dystonia
- National Institute on Aging. Parkinson's Disease: Causes, Symptoms, and Treatments
- National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. Parkinson's Disease in Adults , guideline NG71
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Signs and Symptoms of Stroke