

Post-Polio Syndrome (Sequelae) Facts



The most important practice for polio survivors is rest

For years polio was one of the most feared diseases in America. Today, few people in the United States and other developed countries get polio, thanks to the polio vaccine. But for some polio survivors, the effects of polio are reappearing as a condition called **post-polio syndrome or PPS (also known as post-polio sequelae).**

Symptoms

PPS is a combination of disabling symptoms that appear 10 – 40 years after the illness. Common symptoms of **PPS** include:

- New muscle weakness in arms and legs
- Tiredness and exhaustion after any normal activity
- Muscle and joint pain
- Breathing or swallowing problems
- Trouble sleeping and difficulty breathing while sleeping (sleep apnea)
- Sensitivity to cold temperatures

Risk Factors

Factors that may increase your risk of developing **PPS** are:

- Severe first polio infection
- Polio infection during teen or adult years
- Muscle use/overuse that leads to fatigue

Causes

It is unknown why **PPS** appears so many years after the polio attack. When poliovirus infects the body, it damages nerve cells (neurons) that activate your brain and turn on your muscles. A poliovirus infection can leave more than 50% of the neurons dead or damaged. Over the years, overworking the damaged neurons that have survived can lead to even further damage. **PPS** is not an infectious process, and persons experiencing the syndrome do not shed poliovirus.

Diagnosis

Doctors look for three things to decide whether you have **PPS**:

- Previous polio diagnosis
- Long -term recovery (individual has had no symptoms for 10-40 years) followed by new symptoms
- Slow onset of weakness that interferes with daily activities and unexplained tiredness not caused by other conditions



Doctors may need to take a complete medical history and may test for other conditions that can cause muscle weakness and fatigue, such as anemia, slow thyroid, heart or lung disease and other motor neuron disease before making a PPS diagnosis.

Treatment

There is no single treatment for **PPS** because everyone's symptoms are different. Some of the suggested treatments for **PPS** are:

- Occupational therapy to learn to conserve energy and use assistive devices
- Physical therapy for bracing, and stretching to help with muscle pain
- Treatment for sleep disorders and medication to treat muscle movements in sleep
- Speech therapy and studies to help with swallowing problems
- Aspirin and other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs to ease muscle and joint pain if necessary

The goal of treatment is to prevent falls, preserve nerve cells (neurons) and help management of PPS so that you can continue to live as comfortably as possible.

Self Care – The Most Important “Treatment” for PPS

- Listen to your body. If any activity causes fatigue, weakness, or pain, polio survivors should do less or discontinue the activity.
- Save energy by using assistive devices and changing your lifestyle at work or at home.
- Ask for help from friends, family, and organizations that know about **PPS**.
- Keep your home at a comfortable temperature and dress in layers when you go out.

Research shows that **PPS** symptoms lessen when polio survivors stop overusing their damaged neurons. Most survivors also have a decrease in fatigue, weakness and pain once they start taking care of themselves.

Polio vaccines are still very important today. Adults and children should continue to get all their vaccines on time to stay healthy, and to keep families and friends safe from polio and other dangerous diseases.

For more information

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