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Common Neurological Disorders: Symptoms, Diagnosis and Treatment Options

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A headache that refuses to go away. A hand that has started to tremble while holding a cup of tea.



A parent who forgets the names of grandchildren they have known for years. Changes like these are easy to brush aside as stress, tiredness or simply age. Sometimes they are exactly that. At other times, they are early signs of a problem with the nervous system.

Neurological disorders affect the brain, spinal cord and nerves, the network that controls movement, sensation, memory, speech and even breathing. They are among the leading causes of disability worldwide, and India carries a large share of that burden. The good news is that many of these conditions can be managed well, especially when they are recognised early.

What Are Neurological Disorders?

The nervous system works like the body's communication network. The brain sends and receives signals through the spinal cord and a vast web of nerves that reach every part of the body. When any part of this network is damaged, by reduced blood supply, infection, injury, inflammation or the gradual loss of nerve cells, the result is a neurological disorder.

Because the nervous system controls so much, the symptoms can vary widely. One person may have trouble walking, another may lose sensation in their feet, and a third may notice changes in memory or mood.

Common Neurological Disorders

Stroke: A stroke happens when blood supply to part of the brain is blocked or a blood vessel in the brain bursts. It is a medical emergency. Warning signs include sudden weakness or numbness on one side of the body, a drooping face, slurred speech, loss of balance and sudden loss of vision. The simple test many doctors teach is BE FAST: Balance, Eyes, Face, Arms, Speech and Time to call for help. Every minute matters, because brain cells begin to die quickly without oxygen.

Epilepsy: Epilepsy causes repeated seizures due to sudden bursts of abnormal electrical activity in the brain. Not every seizure involves jerking movements. Some appear as brief staring spells, confusion or a few seconds of unusual behaviour. With the right medicines, many people with epilepsy live full, active lives.

Migraine: Migraine is far more than an ordinary headache. It often brings throbbing pain on one side of the head, along with nausea and sensitivity to light or sound. Some people see flashing lights or zigzag lines before the pain begins. Frequent migraines can seriously affect work and daily life, but they can be controlled with treatment and by identifying personal triggers.

Parkinson's disease: This is a progressive condition in which the brain gradually loses cells that produce dopamine, a chemical that helps control movement. Early signs include a tremor at rest, stiffness, slow movement and smaller handwriting. Over time, balance and walking may be affected.

Dementia and Alzheimer's disease: Dementia refers to a decline in memory, thinking and reasoning that interferes with daily life. Alzheimer's disease is its most common form. Forgetting recent conversations, repeating questions, getting lost in familiar places and changes in personality are common early signs. These are often mistaken for normal ageing.

Peripheral neuropathy: This condition affects the nerves outside the brain and spinal cord, most often in the hands and feet. Tingling, burning, numbness and weakness are typical. In India, long-standing diabetes is one of its most common causes, which makes regular foot and nerve checks important for people with diabetes.

Multiple sclerosis: In multiple sclerosis, the immune system attacks the protective covering of nerves. Symptoms may include blurred vision, numbness, fatigue and difficulty with balance, and they often come and go in episodes.

Symptoms That Should Not Be Ignored

Some signs need urgent medical attention, while others call for an early consultation. It is worth seeing a doctor if you or a family member notices:

- sudden weakness, numbness or drooping on one side of the face or body
- difficulty speaking or understanding speech
- a sudden, severe headache unlike any experienced before

- a seizure or episodes of unexplained loss of awareness
- persistent tremor, stiffness or slowness of movement
- increasing forgetfulness or confusion
- tingling or numbness in the hands and feet that does not go away

Sudden symptoms, especially those that point to a stroke, should be treated as an emergency.

How Neurological Disorders Are Diagnosed

Diagnosis usually begins with a detailed conversation about symptoms, when they started and how they have changed over time. A neurological examination follows, in which the doctor checks reflexes, muscle strength, coordination, balance, sensation and memory.

Depending on what the examination suggests, further tests may include:

- **CT scan or MRI:** to look for strokes, tumours, bleeding or other changes in the brain and spinal cord
- **EEG (electroencephalogram):** to record the brain's electrical activity, commonly used when epilepsy is suspected
- **Nerve conduction studies and EMG:** to assess how well nerves and muscles are working
- **Blood tests:** to check for infections, vitamin deficiencies, thyroid problems or diabetes
- **Lumbar puncture:** in some cases, a small sample of the fluid around the spinal cord is tested

Not every patient needs every test. The neurologist chooses investigations based on the symptoms and the likely cause.

Treatment Options

Treatment depends on the condition, its stage and the patient's overall health. In most cases, it combines more than one approach.

Medicines remain the foundation of treatment for many neurological conditions. They can control seizures, reduce the frequency of migraines, ease the symptoms of Parkinson's disease and slow the progression of some disorders.

Emergency stroke care is highly time-sensitive. For a stroke caused by a blocked artery, clot-dissolving medicines may be given if the patient reaches hospital within a few hours of symptoms starting. In selected cases, a procedure called mechanical thrombectomy can remove the clot directly. This is why reaching a hospital equipped for stroke care quickly makes such a difference.

Rehabilitation plays a major role in recovery. Physiotherapy helps rebuild strength and balance, speech therapy supports people who have difficulty speaking or swallowing, and occupational therapy helps patients regain independence in daily tasks.

Surgery may be advised for certain conditions, such as some brain tumours, specific types of epilepsy that do not respond to medicines, or advanced Parkinson's disease, where deep brain stimulation may be considered.

Lifestyle changes support every other form of treatment. Controlling blood pressure, blood sugar and cholesterol, staying physically active, sleeping well and avoiding tobacco all help protect the brain and nerves over the long term.

The Value of Early Care

Many neurological disorders develop slowly, and their early signs are easy to dismiss. Yet early diagnosis often opens up more treatment options, helps prevent complications and allows patients and families to plan ahead. In the case of a stroke, it can decide the outcome.

Anyone noticing persistent or unusual symptoms should consult a neurologist rather than wait for them to settle on their own. In Rajasthan, the **neurology department at Apex Hospitals**, Jaipur provides diagnosis and treatment for a wide range of neurological conditions.