

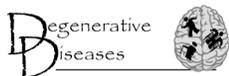
## FACT SHEET



Author: Sue Imbriglio, PT

# Physical Therapy and Huntington's Disease

## *Facts About Huntington's Disease*



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- Huntington's disease (HD) is a rare, inherited disease. Each child of an HD parent has a 50-50 chance of having HD. Symptoms of HD usually start between the ages of 30 and 50 years. HD damages cells in many parts of the brain. The disease causes uncontrolled movements (called *chorea*), problems with smooth movements, difficulty in thinking and learning, and emotional changes.
- In the early stage of HD, people are usually able to care for themselves, but may have trouble solving problems and making decisions. Slowing of movements, chorea, and occasional loss of balance may occur. People may also feel depressed or worried and get irritated easily.
- People in the middle stage can have balance and walking problems that cause them to fall. They may not be able to live alone if they need help with their daily activities. They may become frustrated and angry due to problems with thinking and memory.
- In the late stage people need help for all of their daily activities, and may need special living arrangements for eating, sitting, and sleeping due to severe chorea and loss of controlled movements. However, people in the late stage of Huntington's disease are able to take in information and, with certain supports, can remain involved with people around them.

## *How Can Physical Therapy Help?*

During the early stage of the disease, physical therapists (PTs) can improve the health and wellness of people with HD by:

- teaching them ways to keep their energy high so that they feel less tired during the day.
- teaching an exercise program including **aerobic exercise** such as walking or riding a stationary bicycle to improve overall health and fitness, **stretching exercises** to keep muscles from getting tight, **strengthening exercises** for muscles that are important for good posture and keeping the body steady, and **balance exercises**.



1111 North Fairfax Street  
Alexandria, VA 22314-1488

Phone: 800-999-2782,

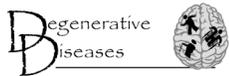
Ext 3237

Fax: 703-706-8578

Email: [neuro@apta.org](mailto:neuro@apta.org)

[www.neuropt.org](http://www.neuropt.org)

## Huntington's Disease



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At the middle stage, PTs provide valuable advice about:

- exercises to improve balance and prevent falls.
- equipment such as wheeled walkers or wheelchairs to help the person to be able to move around safely.
- ways to make the home safe such as reducing clutter or slippery surfaces to prevent falls.

To help people with HD in the late stage be as active as possible, PTs can:

- suggest special chairs to help with the ability to eat.
- teach caregivers how to help the person get in and out of a bed or car.
- teach caregivers how to do exercises that keep muscles loose and promote general well-being.



American Physical Therapy Association  
*The Science of Healing. The Art of Caring.*

1111 North Fairfax Street  
Alexandria, VA 22314-1488

Phone: 800-999-2782,  
Ext 3237

Fax: 703-706-8578

Email: [neuropt@apta.org](mailto:neuropt@apta.org)

[www.neuropt.org](http://www.neuropt.org)