



What is ALS ?



Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), commonly known as Lou Gehrig's disease, is a progressive neurodegenerative disorder that attacks motor neurons in the brain (upper motor neurons) and spinal cord (lower motor neurons).

These motor neurons control the movement of voluntary muscles. When the motor neurons can no longer send impulses to the muscles due to ALS, the muscles begin to waste away (atrophy) causing increased muscle weakness. Motor neuron, or nerve cell, death makes it impossible for the brain to control muscles or signal them to move.

Symptoms of ALS include twitching and cramping of muscles (called fasciculation), loss of controls in hands and arms, impaired use of the arms and legs, weakness and fatigue, tripping and falling, dropping things, slurred or thick speech, and difficulty breathing and swallowing. The symptoms progress relentlessly, ultimately resulting in death. There is no treatment or cure for ALS, and most patients die within 2-5 years of being diagnosed.

In most cases ALS patients do not experience impaired intellectual reasoning, vision, or hearing. Eye and bladder muscles, along with sexual function and drive are not normally affected.

ALS is diagnosed using a variety of tests and examinations, including laboratory tests, muscle and nerve biopsy, spinal tap, X-rays, MRI's, and electrodiagnostic tests.