

### Introduction

Tremor means uncontrolled trembling or shaking movements in one or more parts of your body. Most often, a tremor happens in the hands. But you can also have arm, head, face, vocal cord, trunk and leg tremors.

A tremor can happen in anyone. It commonly happens in otherwise healthy people. There is no cure for most types of tremor. Treatment to relieve tremors depends on the cause.



This reference summary explains what tremor is and what causes it. It explains the diagnosis of tremor and the available treatment options.

### Tremor

Tremor means uncontrolled movement in one or more parts of your body. It is the most common of all uncontrolled movements.

Tremor can affect many body parts, but it often affects the hands. It can also affect the:

- Arms.
- Face.
- Head.
- Legs.
- Trunk.
- Voice.

While it is rarely dangerous, tremor may worsen over time. It can be mild or severe. Tremor may happen at any age. It is most common in people 40 years old and older. It affects men and women equally.



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In some people, tremor is a symptom of a nervous system disorder. It can also be a side effect of certain drugs. The most common form of tremor happens in otherwise healthy people. Although tremor is not life threatening, it can be embarrassing to some people. It can also make it harder to perform daily tasks.

## Symptoms

Symptoms of tremor may include:

- Problems holding and using objects, like a pencil or a fork.
- Shaking in the hands, arms, head, legs or trunk.
- Shaky voice.

Tremor may begin slowly and worsen with movement. It can also worsen during times of emotional stress or when the body becomes tired. Caffeine and extreme temperatures can also worsen tremor symptoms.



## Causes

A problem in a part of the brain that controls muscles may cause tremor. It is often difficult to find an exact reason for the tremor. A person may inherit tremor from one or both parents, known as familial tremor.

Neurological disorders that can produce tremor include:

- Diseases that damage or destroy parts of the brainstem or the cerebellum.
- Multiple sclerosis.
- Parkinson's disease.

The cerebellum is a part of the brain. It plays an important role in balance, movement and muscle control. Multiple sclerosis, or MS, is a nervous system disease that affects the brain and spinal cord. It damages the material that surrounds and protects nerve cells. This damage slows down or blocks messages between the brain and the body, which may cause tremor.



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Parkinson's disease, or PD, is a type of movement disorder. People with the disease may have trouble walking, talking or doing simple tasks. They may also have problems such as depression, sleep problems or trouble chewing, swallowing or speaking.

Other neurological conditions that can cause tremor include:

- Stroke.
- Brain tumors.
- Blood clots in the brain.
- Traumatic brain injury.

Drug use can also cause tremors. Drugs that may cause tremor include amphetamines and corticosteroids. Some of the drugs used for certain psychiatric disorders can also cause tremor. Amphetamines are drugs that have a stimulant effect on the central nervous system. They can be addictive when overused.



Corticosteroids are steroid hormones. The body makes them naturally. A laboratory can produce them as well. Corticosteroids help with the stress response and immune response. They are also involved in other processes in the body.

Other causes of tremor include:

- Alcohol abuse or withdrawal.
- Liver failure.
- Mercury poisoning.
- Overactive thyroid.

Some forms of tremor are inherited and run in families. Others have no known cause.

## Diagnosis

Your health care provider will ask you about your personal and family medical history. He or she will ask about your symptoms. The health care provider will also perform a physical exam.

Finding the cause of tremor often requires ruling out other health problems that could be causing your symptoms.



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The following tests may help with diagnosis:

- Examination of your nervous system function.
- Lab tests.
- Performance tests.

Nervous system function tests may include testing your:

- Ability to feel certain sensations.
- Muscle strength and tone.
- Pattern of movement.
- Posture and coordination.
- Tendon reflexes.



For lab tests, your health care provider may ask for samples of blood or urine. These tests help check for certain diseases, drug side effects, alcohol levels and other factors that can cause tremor.

CT scans or MRIs may also be done to make sure tremor is not caused by a stroke, a tumor or a blood clot. A CT scan uses a computer linked to an X-ray machine to make pictures of areas inside the body. An MRI uses radio waves and a powerful magnet linked to a computer to make pictures of areas inside the body.

Performance tests help your health care provider evaluate the tremor itself. These tests may include:

- Drawing.
- Drinking a glass of water.
- Holding your arms outstretched.
- Writing.



## Treatment

When your health care provider knows the cause of your tremor, he or she often treats it. The type of treatment depends on the cause. If symptoms are mild, your health care provider may not suggest treatment. But if tremor makes the performance of daily activities difficult, you may consider treatment options.

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Tremor symptoms may be controlled using medicine. The type of medicine your health care provider prescribes depends on your symptoms and their severity.

Therapy is another treatment option. Therapy can help improve muscle strength, control and coordination. It can also help you learn how to live with a tremor. Adaptive devices like wrist weights or heavier eating utensils may help you better perform daily activities.

Your health care provider may recommend surgery to treat tremor that severely affects daily activities. The health care provider may use surgery to place a device in your brain. The device sends an electrical pulse to stop signals to the brain that may cause tremor. If you choose to have surgery, you should discuss possible side effects with your health care provider. Though rare, side effects of surgery may be severe and cause headaches, weakness and problems with balance.



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Symptoms of tremor may include:

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- Shaky voice.

Tremor is often caused by problems in parts of the brain that control muscles throughout the body or in specific areas, such as the hands. Drug use can also cause tremor.

When your health care provider knows the cause of your tremor, he or she often treats it. The type of treatment depends on the cause. If symptoms are mild, your health care provider may not suggest treatment. When you need treatment, medicines may be used to control the symptoms of tremor. Therapy is also a treatment option. Surgery may be recommended if tremor affects your ability to perform daily activities.

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