



Working with Your Neurologist



What Is a Neurologist?

A neurologist is a medical doctor with specialized training in diagnosing, treating, and managing disorders of the brain and nervous system. Neurologists do not perform surgery.

A neurologist's training includes an undergraduate degree, four years of medical school, a one-year internship, and at least three years of specialized neurology training. Many neurologists also have additional training in specific areas of neurology known as subspecialties. Some of the more common subspecialties are stroke, epilepsy, and movement disorders such as Parkinson's disease. Others are dementia, headache, and multiple sclerosis.

What Does a Neurologist Treat?

Common neurologic disorders include:

- Alzheimer's disease and other dementias
- Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS, also called Lou Gehrig's disease)
- Brain injury and concussion
- Brain tumors
- Epilepsy
- Migraine and other headaches
- Multiple sclerosis
- Myasthenia gravis
- Parkinson's disease and other movement disorders
- Peripheral neuropathy
- Sleep disorders
- Spinal cord injury
- Stroke
- Tremor

What Is the Role of a Neurologist?

Neurologists are either principal care providers, consultants to other doctors, or both. When a person has a neurologic disorder that requires frequent care, a neurologist is often the principal care provider. This means a neurologist is the lead physician of a team of health care providers working together. People with disorders such as Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease, epilepsy, or multiple sclerosis may see a neurologist as their principal care provider.

In a consulting role, a neurologist will diagnose and participate in treating a neurologic disorder. For ongoing care, he or she will advise the primary care doctor managing the person's overall health. For example, a neurologist may act in a consulting role for conditions such as stroke, concussion, or headache.

Neurologists recommend surgical treatment when indicated, but they do not perform surgery. When treatment includes surgery, neurologists may monitor the patients and supervise the ongoing treatment of their neurologic disorder. Neurosurgeons, not neurologists, perform surgical treatments of the brain or nervous system.



How Are Neurologic Disorders Diagnosed?

An accurate diagnosis is the first step toward effective treatment. Diagnosis begins with taking a detailed health history and performing a careful neurologic examination. A neurologic examination includes assessment of mental status, vision, strength, coordination, sensation, and reflexes. Sometimes, further tests are needed to reach a diagnosis.

Some common neurologic tests are:

- Computed tomography (CT) or computer-assisted tomography (CAT) scans
- Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI)
- Transcranial Doppler (TCD)
- Electroencephalogram (EEG)
- Electromyogram, including nerve conduction study (EMG/NCS)
- Polysomnography (sleep studies)
- Evoked potentials
- Cerebral spinal fluid analysis (lumbar puncture, or spinal tap)

To learn more about these tests, visit the American Academy of Neurology website at www.aan.com/view/workingwithyourdoctor.



How Are Neurologic Disorders Treated?

Treatments are available for many neurologic disorders, both for acute and long-term management. Treatments are different for each condition. Before exploring treatment options, your neurologist will perform and interpret tests of the brain or other parts of the spinal cord to first arrive at a correct diagnosis. Treatment can help people with neurologic disorders maintain the best possible quality of life.

Partnering with Your Neurologist

The management of your disorder is a partnership between you and your neurologist. To provide the best care, your neurologist needs to know all about your symptoms and medical history. Likewise, you need to get answers to your questions.

Keeping a notebook about your condition and bringing a few well-organized questions to your appointments can be helpful. You should also bring a list of all of your current medications. Include the name, dosage, and how often you take them. Be sure to include supplements and over-the-counter medications. Be open with your neurologist about any concerns you have about your symptoms or condition, even if you feel they may be unimportant or embarrassing. Many problems can be treated and managed.

It often helps to have a family member or friend with you at your appointment to listen, take notes, or ask questions. For more suggestions on working with your neurologist, visit the American Academy of Neurology website at www.aan.com/view/preparingforanofficevisit.

Once you are back home, make sure to take any medications according to the prescribed schedule and follow your neurologist's instructions. Call your neurologist's office if you have any complications or changes in your condition, or if you experience side effects from the medications.

Help Us Cure Brain Disease

Make a Donation to Research

The American Brain Foundation supports vital research and education to discover causes, improved treatments, and cures for brain and other nervous system diseases. To learn more or to make a donation to support research, visit www.CureBrainDisease.org.

Make Your Voice Heard

To keep research advancing toward future cures and treatments for brain disease, it is important for people affected by neurologic disorders to advocate for more research funding. Contact your members of Congress and ask them to support neurology research by increasing funding for the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Look up your Congressional representatives at www.senate.gov and www.house.gov. Your voice can make a difference.

Take Part in Research

People are needed for clinical trials that can help find new treatments for neurologic disorders. Clinical trials are research studies. They help ensure that new drugs are both safe and effective. Ask your neurologist how to volunteer for a clinical trial. You can also find trials through patient organizations or the American Academy of Neurology website at www.aan.com/view/clinicaltrials.

Resources

American Academy of Neurology

www.aan.com/patients

(800) 879-1960

The American Academy of Neurology website for patients and caregivers offers a wealth of articles, information about events and resources, and links to support groups, clinical trial information, and more.

Neurology Now® magazine

www.neurologynow.com

(800) 422-2681

Free magazine for patients and caregivers, courtesy of the American Academy of Neurology. Stories about people living with neurologic disorders, the latest information on resources and treatments, and more.

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality

www.ahrq.gov/questions

Tips and tools for better communication with your physician.



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(800) 879-1960

The American Academy of Neurology, an association of 25,000 neurologists and neuroscience professionals, is dedicated to promoting the highest quality patient-centered neurologic care. For more information about the American Academy of Neurology, visit *www.aan.com*.