



# TIPS

## for Living With Essential Tremor

Essential tremor is a progressive neurologic disease that causes involuntary and rhythmic shaking, generally in the arms and hands. Essential tremor is believed to be caused by electrical fluctuations in the brain that send abnormal signals to muscles. If you have essential tremor, the following tips may help you better cope with your symptoms.

**Be clear about your diagnosis.** Essential tremor is often misdiagnosed as Parkinson's disease, but there are distinct differences between the diseases. People with essential tremor experience tremor when using their hands. However, people with Parkinson's disease usually experience tremor while their hands are at rest. Receiving the proper diagnosis is important for treatment.

**Determine the severity.** Having essential tremor can be socially isolating, but it is not a life-threatening disease unless it prevents a person from caring for him- or herself. The lower part of the body is seldom affected by essential tremor, and other conditions cannot cause essential tremor.

**Review the statistics.** Essential tremor is the most common tremor that adults experience. Though the onset of essential tremor can occur at any age, its incidence is largely seen in people age 40 and older.

**Understand the facts.** There is no cure for essential tremor, but many drug and nondrug therapies can help you manage the disorder. Treatment plans should be coordinated with an expert team that is knowledgeable about essential tremor.

**Know your risk factors.** Various factors can cause essential tremor to worsen. These factors include emotional stress, fatigue, insufficient sleep, physical activity, caffeinated beverages, stimulants found in over-the-counter medications, and extreme temperatures.

**Make adjustments in your day-to-day life.** Having severe tremors can make it harder to perform daily activities. Consider purchasing clothes with Velcro fasteners or button hooks, wear slip-on shoes and use shoehorns, cook or eat with utensils that have larger handles, and use straws to drink beverages.

**Rely on therapy when needed.** Physical or occupational therapy may help to improve muscle strength, coordination, and control for some people with essential tremor. Experienced physical and occupational therapists can work with patients to address specific needs.

**Consider all aspects of treatment.** The goal of treating essential tremor is to keep movements as normal as possible with the smallest amount of medication. Essential tremor that does not respond to medication may require surgery that is intended to interrupt abnormal movements through deep brain stimulation.

*This page is part of an ongoing series of practical tips for patients with neurologic disorders. If you have compiled clinically relevant tips that you wish to share, please contact the editor at [info@neurologyreviews.com](mailto:info@neurologyreviews.com).*

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