

Muscle Tone Changes (Spasticity) After a Stroke

General Information

Spasticity (abnormal muscle tone) is caused by damage to the portion of your brain or spinal cord that controls movement.

This can interfere with normal movement causing your muscles to move or jump on their own. It can also affect your speech.

Signs and Symptoms

You may have one or more of these in your affected arm or leg:

- muscle tightness
- tugging feeling on a joint
- unusual positioning of a joint (wrists, fingers, shoulder, foot)
- jerky movements you do not cause
- pain
- trouble doing self-care or specific movement
- overactive reflexes.

Stages of Spasticity

There are different stages of muscle tone recovery that you may experience during rehabilitation.

- Your arm or leg may be limp or floppy.
- Your arm or leg may have a specific resting position.

- One muscle in use may lead to the same response in other muscles to make a certain movement.
- Your arm or leg may move on its own when your muscle tone starts to return. It may not always do what your brain tells it to do.
- You may not be able to move one joint by itself. Instead, your entire arm or leg moves.
- Your arm or leg begins to respond to your brain.
- You can start to voluntarily use a muscle.

What You Can Do

- Talk with your doctor about:
 - medicines that can help
 - injections if medicines do not control abnormal muscle tone
- Talk with your physical therapist about:
 - stretches and joint motion in therapy sessions
 - stretches you can do on your own or with members of your care circle (family members or friends).
 - using braces or splints (if needed).