



FRESH RIVER  
HEALTHCARE

## Huntington's Disease Overview

Huntington's disease (HD) is a genetic disorder that causes the progressive breakdown of nerve cells in the brain. It is caused by a mutation in the gene for a protein called "huntingtin". The defect causes the building blocks of the DNA to replicate many more times than normal.

As a genetic disease, it can be a multi-generational ticking bomb for any family because any child of a person with HD has a 50/50 chance of inheriting the gene. Subsequently, any person who inherits the gene will eventually develop the disease. In conjunction with a complete medical history, neurological and laboratory testing, there is a genetic test to confirm diagnosis of HD.

Huntington's has a broad and severe impact on a person's functional abilities. The symptoms of HD, which generally come on slowly and vary from person to person, are in areas of cognitive, physical and psychological impairments. They may include but are not limited to the following: personality changes, mood swings, depression, forgetfulness, impaired judgment, slurred speech, difficulty swallowing, weight loss, unsteady gait, involuntary movements – also called "chorea".

Many people often describe the symptoms of HD as having Parkinson's, ALS (Lou Gehrig disease) and Alzheimer's – all simultaneously. The symptoms of HD typically begin between ages of 30 and 50. An earlier onset form called juvenile HD, occurs under age 20.

There are many clinical studies and trials happening around the world today to find a cure but currently there is no cure for Huntington's disease. Medication are used to help manage the symptoms of Huntington's, but no treatment will prevent the physical, mental and cognitive decline of the condition.

Lately, in the news you have have heard about a new medication that was approved by the FDA for the treatment of chorea associated with Huntington's which is a huge step

for the HD community.

As a therapist I use Rehabilitation as a tool and conjunction to medications to help folks with HD through Physical, Occupational and Speech Therapy. The goals to helping people to address such things as: strength, balance, gross motor skills, activity of daily living, swallowing difficulty or communication issues.

If you or a loved one is afflicted with HD then talk with your doctor to see if Rehabilitation can help and be a part of your treatment plan. Or, if you feel we can be of service, call us at Fresh River Healthcare at (860) 623-9846 to see if our inpatient or outpatient services are right for you or your loved on.

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