

Why the Word 'Psychogenic'?

Functional dystonia is sometimes called *psychogenic dystonia*, which refers to the observation that many cases have psychological or psychiatric factors that contribute to the physical symptoms. Treating underlying emotional and mental disorders can reduce the movement symptoms, though researchers do not yet fully understand why this is the case.

The human brain is a spectacularly complicated and interconnected system. Areas of the brain associated with movement are also involved in cognition, emotion, memory, and other mental functions.

Researchers are actively studying functional dystonia and functional movement disorders to better understand the underlying neurology and improve treatment.

What is Functional Dystonia?

Dystonia is a neurological disorder that causes intense, involuntary muscle contractions. These muscle spasms make it difficult for patients to move their bodies freely and control their body movements. There are many types of dystonia and numerous causes.

In *functional dystonia*, there is abnormal, unintended movement or positioning of the body due to the nervous system not working properly. Functional dystonia can cause movement symptoms in the face, neck, shoulder, torso, and/or limbs.

Functional dystonia is often seen in individuals with psychiatric disorders and/or exposure to psychological stressors. The start of symptoms is often preceded by an injury, illness, or emotionally stressful event.

What is the DMRF?

The Dystonia Medical Research Foundation (DMRF) is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that funds medical research toward a cure, promotes awareness and education, and supports the well being of affected individuals and families.

To learn more about dystonia and the DMRF, contact:

**Dystonia Medical
Research Foundation**

One East Wacker Drive, Suite 1730
Chicago, Illinois 60601-1980

Phone: 312-755-0198

Toll free: 800-377-DYST (3978)

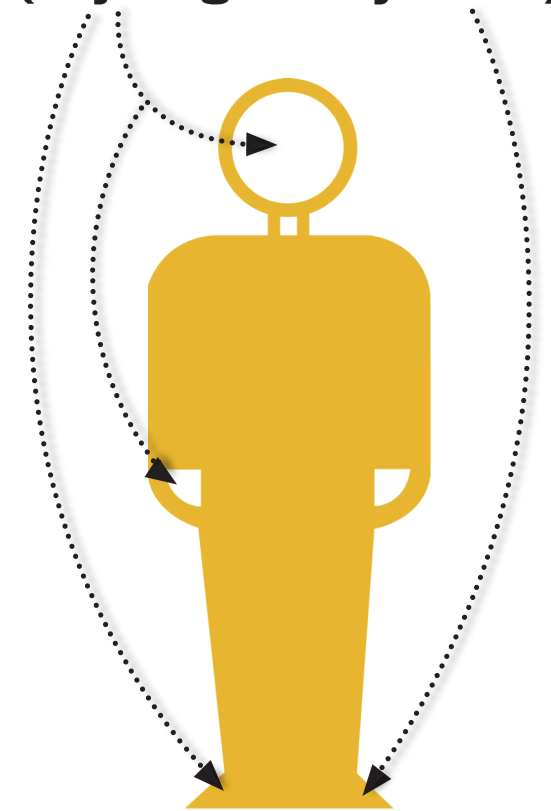
Email: dystonia@dystonia-foundation.org

Web: www.dystonia-foundation.org

*Connect with the DMRF on Facebook,
Twitter, YouTube, and Sharecare.*

For more in-depth information,
visit [www.dystonia-foundation.org/
functional_dystonia](http://www.dystonia-foundation.org/functional_dystonia).

Functional Dystonia (Psychogenic Dystonia)



*Many thanks to past DMRF Clinical
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What are Functional Movement Disorders?

Functional dystonia belongs to a category of disorders called *functional movement disorders*. Many people with functional movement disorders experience a mix of motor symptoms including dystonia, tremor, myoclonus, gait disorders, and tics. They may also experience pain, weakness, sensory symptoms, non-epileptic seizures, and other functional neurological symptoms.

Functional movement disorders are common, representing up to 25% of patients treated in movement disorder clinics. Functional movement disorders affect men and women as well as children.

Functional Movement Disorders...

- Are real and disabling disorders.
- Are not deliberate. Patients are not making up symptoms.
- Do not mean an affected individual is “crazy” or “hysterical.”
- Are due to dysfunction of the nervous system, not neurological damage or disease.
- Are treatable.

What is the Cause?

Many researchers believe functional movement disorders occur due to an underlying vulnerability in the brain combined with an external trigger, though the mechanism is not yet fully understood. Research suggests that the process in the brain that helps a person sense whether a movement is voluntary or involuntary becomes disordered, resulting in unintentional movements or postures. These disorders are caused by changes in how the brain functions, not damage to the structures of the nervous system.

How is Functional Dystonia Diagnosed?

Diagnosing functional dystonia can be difficult and should be left to movement disorder neurologists and psychiatrists with expertise in diverse neurological diseases.

The diagnosis of functional dystonia is made on the positive observation of the clinical signs in the neurological examination, not solely by ruling out other disorders or the presence of psychological or psychiatric factors. Although psychological and psychiatric factors often contribute to functional dystonia, these signs are not always present.

What Healthcare Professionals Treat Functional Dystonia?

Many individuals with functional dystonia have complex healthcare needs, so a team of medical experts may be appropriate. The team may include a movement disorder neurologist, psychiatrist, psychotherapist, physical therapist, and additional healthcare providers.

Possible Indicators of Functional Dystonia

- Sudden symptom onset
- Minor injury preceding symptom onset
- Symptoms are varying and unpredictable across time
- Symptoms contradict hallmark features of other neurological disorders
- Symptoms are lessened with distraction
- Spontaneous remissions and relapse
- Abnormal movements and pain are inconsistent with extent of injury
- Psychiatric symptoms
- Exposure to psychological stressors
- Many additional medically unexplained symptoms

What Treatments are Available?

Therapy for functional movement disorders must be tailored to the needs of the individual. The goal of treatment is to lessen symptoms and improve function by helping the brain override the mechanism that is causing the unintentional movements or postures.

Treatment may require physical and/or occupational therapy, cognitive behavior therapy, and/or oral medications such as antidepressants.

Living with Functional Dystonia

Living well with a functional movement disorder is possible. In some cases, treatment can dramatically reduce or eliminate symptoms.

Individuals affected by functional dystonia are strongly encouraged to:

- Seek evaluation from a neurologist with special training in movement disorders.
- Seek expert mental health professionals to diagnose and treat possible underlying emotional or mental disorders.
- Learn about functional movement disorders and treatment options.
- Develop a support system of support groups, online resources, friends, and family.
- Explore complementary therapies for overall wellness.
- Get active within the patient advocacy community.

What Support is Available?

The Dystonia Medical Research Foundation (DMRF) can provide educational resources, self-help opportunities, contact with others, volunteer opportunities, and connection to the greater dystonia community.