

# Ataxia-A Rare Neurological Disease

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Ataxia is a degenerative disease of the nervous system, Impaired balance or coordination, can be due to damage to nerves, brain, and muscles.

Individual with Ataxia may experience the problems while using their fingers, hands, arms, legs, walking, moving their eyes or speaking. Ataxia affects people with all ages. Age of symptom-onset may vary widely, childhood to late-adulthood. Complications are serious and oftentimes debilitating. Few types of Ataxia also lead to an early death.

Ataxia symptoms vary from person to person and type of Ataxia. Rate of progression varies as well. Symptoms may worsen over decades – or quickly, over months. Common symptoms of Ataxia are

- Lack of coordination
- Trouble eating and swallowing
- Slurred speech
- Deterioration of fine motor skills
- Eye movement abnormalities
- Difficulty walking
- Tremors
- Heart problems
- Gait abnormalities

Individuals with Ataxia require the use of walkers, wheelchairs, and/or scooters to aid in their mobility very often.

## Diagnosis

Ataxia is diagnosed using by medical history, a complete neurological evaluation and family history. Various blood tests should be performed for other disorders. Genetic blood tests are available for other types of hereditary Ataxia.

## Treatment

The aim of treatment for Ataxia is to improve the quality of life and requires an individualized approach. It is important to work closely with a neurologist to develop a plan to address the condition and symptoms. Speech and language therapy, physical therapy, and occupational therapy, are the common treatments. Sometimes they use in conjunction with medication therapy to manage the symptoms. Several research efforts are currently underway to find more effective treatments for Ataxia.

Staying active for as long as possible is an important part of the treatment plan for people with Ataxia. Consult with your physician, neurologist or physical therapist before starting an exercise regimen. Read “11 Exercises for Ataxia Patients,” for things that can be done at home to help maintain strength and balance.

## Medications for Ataxia

Symptoms which are common and associated with Ataxia are listed as below with medications used to treat the individual. These medications have been reported by Ataxia clinicians or medical literature. The generic name is listed first (if one is available) with the brand name in parentheses.

**Depression:** SNRI's (Selective norepinephrine-serotonin reuptake inhibitors) and SSRI's (Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors)–classes of drugs for depression or anxiety.

**Vertigo/Dizziness:** 4-aminopyridine, Acetazolamide (Diamox), Flunarizine, Baclofen, Gabapentin (Neurontin), Clonazepam, Meclizine, Memantine, Ondansetron (Zofran), Scopolamine (eg., Transderm Scop Patch for motion sickness).

**Fatigue:** Carnitine, Creatine, Amantadine, Bupropion (Wellbutrin), Atomoxetine (Strattera, Modafinil), (Provigil) or Armodafinil (Nuvigil), Pyridostigmine, Desvenlafaxine (Pristiq), Selegiline (Eldepryl), Venlafaxine (Effexor), SSRI's, SNRI's – classes of drugs for depression or anxiety that also help for fatigue.

**Incoordination/Imbalance:** Buspirone (Buspar), Amantadine, Riluzole (Rilutek).

**Spasms or Muscle Cramps:** Baclofen, Tizanidine (Zanaflex).

**Neuropathy:** Lyrica, Cymbalta, as well as usage of Gabapentin, other anti-seizure drugs, and various tricyclic anti-depressants.

**Spasticity, Dystonia, Stiffness, Rigidity:** Botulinum toxin Shots, Dantrolene sodium (Dantrium), Amantadine, Baclofen, Diazepam (Valium), Levodopa (carbidopa-levodopa, Sinemet), Ropinirole (Requip), Tizanidine (Zanaflex), Pramipexole (Mirapex), Trihexyphenidyl.

**Tremor or Rest Tremor:** Amantadine, Botulinum toxin Shots, Carbamazepine, Clonazepam, Deep Brain Stimulation, Flunarizine, Gabapentin (Neurontin), Isoniazid, Levetiracetam, Levodopa (carbidopa-levodopa, Sinemet), NAC (N-acetylcysteine), Ondansetron (Zofran), Pramipexole (Mirapex), Primidone, Propranolol, Ropinirole (Requip), Topiramate, Valproic Acid (Depakote).

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