



DOCTOR DISCUSSION GUIDE

Managing Muscular Dystrophy

If you or your child have muscular dystrophy, it's important to be involved in your medical care to help optimize your strength and functions. Asking the right questions during your conversation with a doctor will help you know what to expect and how to better navigate your condition. Familiarize yourself with these common terms before your appointment to help facilitate your discussion.

Vocabulary to Know

Your doctor might mention these common terms. Here's what they mean.

Atrophy	With muscular dystrophy, muscles can decrease in number and each muscle can become smaller, resulting in a thin appearance, often with decreased strength.
Hypertrophy	Sometimes, arms and legs may appear larger than normal. This can result from hypertrophy, which is excess muscle, or it can result from weight gain and muscle loss due to a combination of muscle disease and lack of exercise.
Dysarthria	Difficulty in using the muscles that control speech is described as dysarthria. Words can sound slurred and some sounds may be hard to pronounce. This is distinct from aphasia, which is difficulty with language.
Dysphagia	Difficulty controlling the swallowing muscles is described as dysphagia. It can result in drooling, choking, or coughing when eating. Dysphagia can be dangerous if food goes down the wrong pipe and into the lungs. Often, it is best to manage dysphagia by eating slowly and sticking to soft foods. Swallowing therapy can help optimize the muscles as well.
Myopathy	All muscle diseases are described as myopathy, including muscular dystrophies. There are a variety of myopathies, and it may require some testing to distinguish one from another.
Dystrophin	Dystrophin is a protein that is part of a muscle. Muscular dystrophy is caused by an irregularity in the dystrophin protein, which causes diminished muscle function.
Neuropathy	Nerve disease is described as neuropathy. Often, nerve disease causes weakness, and it can be distinguished from muscular dystrophy using diagnostic tests.
Autonomic Symptoms	The autonomic nervous system controls the muscles that power breathing, digestive organs, blood pressure, heart function, pupils of the eyes, and sweating. Myopathy generally affects the skeletal muscles, which are the muscles that control voluntary (on purpose) movement of the body. Some types of muscular dystrophy can also affect autonomic function, resulting in problems like constipation or diarrhea, abnormal sweating, or blood pressure irregularities.

