



Understanding Encephalitis

Over the past decade, more than 250,000 people have been diagnosed with encephalitis in the United States.

1. Introduction

Encephalitis is the inflammation of the brain's active tissue caused by infection or autoimmune reactions. Encephalitis is anticipated to rise as more autoimmune cases are discovered. As diseases such as Zika, Chikungunya, and Powassan rise, more cases of encephalitis are anticipated.

2. Symptoms

The symptoms of encephalitis can vary depending on the affected brain area. However, some of the more common symptoms include:

- + High fever
- + Seizures
- + Headaches
- + Nausea and vomiting
- + Anxiety or irritability
- + Confusion and disorientation
- + Excessive sleepiness
- + Cognitive impairment or other behavioral changes

3. Diagnosis

A healthcare professional will conduct a physical examination and gather your medical history. Depending on the results of the exam, the healthcare provider may recommend other tests such as:

- + **Brain imaging**, such as MRI or CT scans, can reveal if there is swelling in the brain.
- + A **spinal tap** is a procedure that extracts cerebrospinal fluid (CSF). Changes in CSF can indicate infection or inflammation associated with encephalitis.
- + **Other lab tests** of blood, urine or excretion samples can be tested for viruses or other infectious agents.

4. Treatments

Encephalitis has different treatments depending on the root cause of the condition. Patients will often be treated with antiviral medications for cases of encephalitis caused by certain viruses. However, some insect-borne viruses may not respond to these treatments. Autoimmune causes of encephalitis are treated with medicines that target your immune system, known as immunomodulatory medicines. Individuals who still experience complications from encephalitis may need additional therapies, like physical or occupational therapy.

Did you know?

Insects like mosquitos and ticks can transmit viruses that cause encephalitis.

For more information on encephalitis and supportive resources, please visit [mayoclinic.org](https://www.mayoclinic.org).

References:

- <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/encephalitis>
- <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/encephalitis/symptoms-causes/syc-20356136>