



What is Lambert-Eaton Myasthenic Syndrome?

About 60% of LEMS cases are associated with having small-cell lung cancer.

1. Introduction

Lambert-Eaton myasthenic syndrome (LEMS) is an autoimmune disorder in which the immune system attacks the body's own tissues at the junction between motor nerves and muscle. The damage interferes with nerve cells' ability to send signals to muscle cells, resulting in muscle weakness throughout the body, along with a range of other symptoms. LEMS is more common in men and in people with a history of using tobacco products. Diagnosis tends to occur at two peaks: first around age 35 and second around age 60.

2. Causes

LEMS is caused by the immune system mistakenly attacking and damaging the nerves. Though it is not known what triggers this attack, in many cases, LEMS is associated with small-cell lung cancer. Symptoms can begin many months or years before the cancer is diagnosed or even develops. In about 40% of LEMS cases, no underlying cancer is identified. In these instances, the disorder is thought to develop following another autoimmune disease.

3. Symptoms

LEMS symptoms include:

- + Muscle weakness and muscle fatigue
- + Trouble walking or climbing stairs
- + Muscle pain or stiffness
- + Tingling sensation in the hands or feet
- + Difficulty lifting objects or raising the arms
- + Drooping eyelids, dry eyes, and blurred vision
- + Problems swallowing
- + Dizziness upon standing
- + Dry mouth
- + Decreased sweating
- + Trouble breathing and respiratory failure

4. Treatment

If LEMS is associated with cancer, treatment may include chemotherapy, radiation, and/or surgery. Other treatment options include medications to reduce immune activity. This focuses on relieving the symptoms of LEMS.

Did you know?

LEMS affects about 2.8 million people worldwide and about 400 people in the U.S.

For more information on LEMS, please visit [mda.org](https://www.mda.org).

References:

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