



AMYOTROPHIC LATERAL SCLEROSIS SOCIETY OF CANADA  
**ALS • QUESTIONS**  
SOCIÉTÉ CANADIENNE DE LA SCLÉROSE LATÉRALE AMYOTROPHIQUE

BACKGROUND INFORMATION #2 • GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT ALS & THE ALS SOCIETY OF CANADA

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### WHAT IS ALS?

ALS, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, sometimes called Lou Gehrig's Disease or Motor Neuron Disease, is a rapidly progressive fatal neuromuscular disease. It is characterized by degeneration of a select group of nerve cells and pathways in the brain and spinal cord, which leads to progressive paralysis of the muscles. Generally there is little impairment of the intellect, sight, touch, hearing, or smell. For further information about available resources, services and support, contact the ALS Society of Canada

### HOW DOES ONE GET ALS?

In the majority of cases the cause is unknown. In about 5–10% of cases there is a hereditary pattern. Research is being conducted in areas relating to genetic predispositions, viral or infectious agents, environmental toxins, and immunological changes.

### WHO GETS ALS?

ALS can strike anyone. ALS is not contagious, does not discriminate, and can strike at any age. The usual age of onset is between 55 and 65, but people under 20 have been diagnosed. ALS is usually fatal within three to five years of diagnosis although some people live much longer.

### WHAT ARE THE EARLY SYMPTOMS?

ALS usually becomes apparent either in the legs, the arms, the throat, or the upper chest area. Some people begin to trip and fall; some lose the use of their hands and arms; some find it hard to swallow and some slur their speech.

For further information  
about available resources, services and support,  
contact the ALS Society of Canada  
416-497-2267 • 1-800-267-4257 • alscanada@als.ca.

### WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF ALS?

Because ALS frequently takes its toll before being positively diagnosed, many patients are debilitated before learning they have ALS. The disease does not usually affect the senses – taste, touch, sight, smell, and hearing – or the mind.

ALS wreaks a devastating effect on patients as well as their families. As they cope with the prospect of advancing disability and death, ALS consumes their financial and emotional reserves. It is a costly disease in its later stages, demanding both extensive nursing care and expensive equipment.

### WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT ALS?

Although recent scientific research has resulted in significant breakthroughs, much more research is needed to find a cure. If you designate your donation to research, it will go directly to fund research for better treatment and a cure for ALS.

### IS THERE HOPE FOR PEOPLE WITH ALS?

There is no treatment that prolongs life significantly. Some drugs now available and others being developed will offer new treatment options. Research is investigating ways to reverse the disease. There may eventually be a cure for ALS.

Many people with ALS say that they live life more fully now, with much joy, even knowing what is to come. In the meantime, good planning – and medical and social management – can ease the burden on the person with ALS and family members.

### WHAT IS THE ALS SOCIETY OF CANADA?

The ALS Society of Canada is committed to provide care and find a cure for ALS. With our regional partners, our mission is:

- To provide the best possible support for people with ALS, their families, and care givers;
- To support research into the cause of and cure for ALS; and
- To build public awareness of ALS and its impact.

ALS SOCIETY OF CANADA • AMYOTROPHIC LATERAL SCLEROSIS SOCIETY OF CANADA  
SLA CANADA • SOCIÉTÉ CANADIENNE DE LA SCLÉROSE LATÉRALE AMYOTROPHIQUE

265 Yorkland Blvd., Suite 300, Toronto, Ontario M2J 1S5  
Phone toll free: 1-800-267-4257 • Toronto local calling area: 416-497-2267 • Fax 416-497-1256  
Email: alscanada@als.ca • Web page: <http://www.als.ca> • Charitable registration: 10670 8977 RR0002