

Abnormal Eye Movements (Nystagmus)

KEY POINTS

- Nystagmus is constant, rapid eye movements that you can't control.
 - The treatment of nystagmus depends on its cause. If your healthcare provider thinks that it is related to medicine you are using, you may be switched to a different medicine. Tumors may be treated with steroids, radiation, or surgery. Your healthcare provider may recommend eye muscle surgery or medicines to help relax eye muscles.
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What is nystagmus?

Nystagmus is constant, rapid eye movements that you cannot control. The movements may be in any direction. Most often, eyes move from side to side, but they may also move up and down or even in circles.

What is the cause?

Nystagmus may be something you are born with. Nystagmus may also be caused by:

- Eye problems such as strabismus, retinopathy, or cataracts
- Medicines used to treat seizures or some mental health problems
- A head injury, brain tumor, or a stroke
- Albinism, which is a lack of color in the eyes, and sometimes in the skin and hair
- Multiple sclerosis
- Problems with your inner ear

Sometimes, no cause can be found.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may include:

- Eye movements that you cannot control
- Dizziness, trouble with your balance, or holding your head in a turned or tilted position
- Blurry vision, trouble seeing in low light or being bothered by bright lights
- Feeling as if everything around you is shaking or jumping

These symptoms may come and go.

How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will ask about your symptoms and medical history and do exams and tests such as:

- An exam using a microscope with a light attached, called a slit lamp, to look closely at the front and back of your eye
- Testing and recording your eye movements
- CT scan, which uses X-rays and a computer to show detailed pictures of your brain and eye
- MRI, which uses a strong magnetic field and radio waves to show detailed pictures of your brain and check for swelling, stroke, or tumors

You may be referred to a specialist for treatment.

How is it treated?

The treatment of nystagmus depends on its cause. If your healthcare provider thinks that it is related to medicine you are using, you may be switched to a different medicine. Tumors may be treated with steroids, radiation, or surgery. Your provider will treat eye problems or may prescribe glasses to correct vision problems.

Your healthcare provider may recommend eye muscle surgery to decrease the symptoms of nystagmus.

Medicines may be prescribed to help relax eye muscles.

How can I take care of myself?

Follow the full course of treatment your healthcare provider prescribes. Ask your healthcare provider:

- How and when you will get your test results
- How long it will take to recover
- If there are activities you should avoid and when you can return to normal activities
- How to take care of yourself at home
- What symptoms or problems you should watch for and what to do if you have them

Make sure you know when you should come back for a checkup. Keep all appointments for provider visits or tests.

How can I prevent nystagmus?

In most cases, nystagmus cannot be prevented.

Reviewed for medical accuracy by faculty at the Wilmer Eye Institute at Johns Hopkins. Web site: <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/wilmer/>

This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.

Developed by Change Healthcare.

Published by Change Healthcare.

Produced in Cork, Ireland.