

The autonomic nervous system controls involuntary actions such as widening or narrowing of our blood vessels. Failure in this system can lead to orthostatic hypotension, which means a sudden drastic drop in blood pressure especially from a lying or sitting down position. The exact cause of pure autonomic failure (PAF) is not known, but is defined as autonomic failure without central nervous system (brain or spinal cord) involvement. PAF is caused by abnormal accumulation of a protein called alpha-synuclein in autonomic nerves. This protein helps nerve cells communicate, but its function is not fully understood. Patients with PAF have a loss of nerve cells (neurons) in the intermediolateral column of the spinal cord. The worldwide prevalence of PAF is not known. The age of onset is during adulthood usually in individuals over 60 years. It is more common in males than in females.