

Cervical dystonia, also known as spasmodic torticollis, is a rare neurological disorder that originates in the brain. It is the most common form of focal dystonia in an office setting. Cervical dystonia is characterized by involuntary muscle contractions in the neck that cause abnormal movements and postures of the neck and head. In some cases, these abnormal contractions may be sustained or continuous; in others, they may be present as spasms that can resemble tremor. The severity of cervical dystonia can vary, but the disorder can cause significant pain and discomfort as well as difficulty due to the abnormal postures. It can affect quality of life and activities of daily living including employment. Cervical dystonia typically begins in middle age, and rarely begins in adolescence and young adulthood. The cause of cervical dystonia is unknown, although a genetic susceptibility is thought to underlie some cases. If cervical dystonia begins in infancy or early childhood, secondary causes should be investigated. Cervical dystonia affects women approximately twice as often as men. It is the most common form of focal dystonia in an office setting. Cervical dystonia may affect individuals of any age, but typically develops in people between 40 and 60 years of age. Cervical dystonia affects people of all ethnic backgrounds. The exact incidence or prevalence of cervical dystonia in the general population is unknown but is estimated to be about 60,000 people in the United States. A diagnosis of cervical dystonia is based upon clinical examination, a detailed patient history, and knowledge of the disorder. No specific laboratory or imaging test confirms a diagnosis of cervical dystonia. There are no abnormalities in laboratory or imaging tests. Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) of the brain is normal, and MRI of the neck does not help with the diagnosis unless compression of the spinal cord is suspected. Electromyography is not indicated unless there are additional signs of nerve irritation.