

Essential tremor (ET) is a progressive, neurological disease characterized by tremor, most often of the hands or arms. A tremor is an involuntary, rhythmic, movement of a body part. Tremor may be seen as involuntary shaking or trembling of the affected area. In individuals with ET, other motor symptoms may be present including an unsteady manner of walking due to an inability to coordinate voluntary movements (ataxia). In some cases, affected individuals may also develop a variety of non-motor symptoms including cognitive impairment, depression or anxiety. ET can occur in childhood or adulthood. The exact, underlying cause of ET is not fully understood. In some cases, the disorder runs in families; in others, it occurs in individuals with no previous family history. The causes of ET are most likely many, which means that several factors, such as genetic and environmental ones, may each play a role in the development of the disorder. ET is the most prevalent tremor disorder and is one of the most common neurological disorders among adults. ET is often misdiagnosed as Parkinson's disease, making it difficult to determine the disorder's true frequency in the general population. An estimated 7 million Americans have ET. The incidence of ET increases with age and more than 4% of the population over the age of 40 has ET. Although the disorder is most common in older adults, it can affect individuals of any age including middle-aged or young adults and children. In rare cases, it has been reported during infancy. Individuals with a family history of ET tend to experience earlier onset of tremor. ET affects both men and women and individuals of every race or ethnicity. A diagnosis of ET is based upon identification of characteristic symptoms, a detailed patient history, and a thorough clinical evaluation. There is no specific test to diagnose ET. A neurological exam and other tests to evaluate the tremor may be conducted to rule out other causes of tremor.