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Contracture deformity

A contracture develops when normally stretchy (elastic) tissues are replaced by nonstretchy (inelastic) fiber-like tissue. This tissue makes it hard to stretch the area and prevents normal movement.

Contractures mostly occur in the skin, the tissues underneath, and the muscles, tendons, joint capsule, and ligaments surrounding a joint. They reduce the range of motion and function in a certain body part. Often, there is also pain.

Causes

Contracture can be caused by any of the following:

- Brain and nervous system disorders, such as cerebral palsy or stroke
- Inherited disorders (such as muscular dystrophy)
- Nerve damage
- Reduced use (for example, from lack of mobility or injuries)
- Severe muscle and bone injuries
- Scarring after traumatic injury or burns

Home Care

Follow your health care provider's instructions for treating a contracture at home. Treatments may include:

- Doing exercises and stretches
- Using braces and splints

When to Contact a Medical Professional

Contact your provider if:

- A contracture seems to be developing.
- You notice a decreased ability to move a joint.

What to Expect at Your Office Visit

Your provider will ask about your symptoms. Questions may include when the symptoms began, whether or not you have pain in the affected area, and what treatments you've had in the past.

Depending on the cause and type of contracture, you may need tests such as an x-ray.

Treatment may include physical therapy, medicines, and orthopedic braces. Surgery may be helpful for some types of contractures.

Alternative Names

Deformity - contracture

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