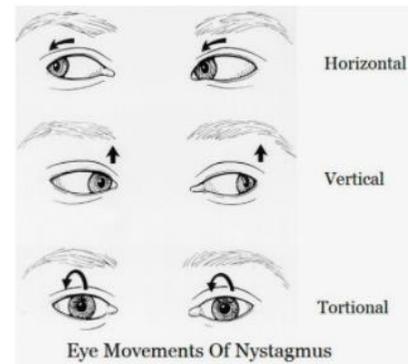


# February 2022 Newsletter



## Understanding and Living With Nystagmus

People with MS often have difficulty with their vision. Nystagmus is an eye movement disorder that sometimes occurs where the eyes move rapidly and uncontrollably. They can move at varying speeds from side to side (horizontal nystagmus), up and down (vertical nystagmus), or in a circle (torsional nystagmus). The movement usually happens in both eyes and they often shake more when looking in certain directions. This can cause problems with vision, depth perception, balance and coordination.

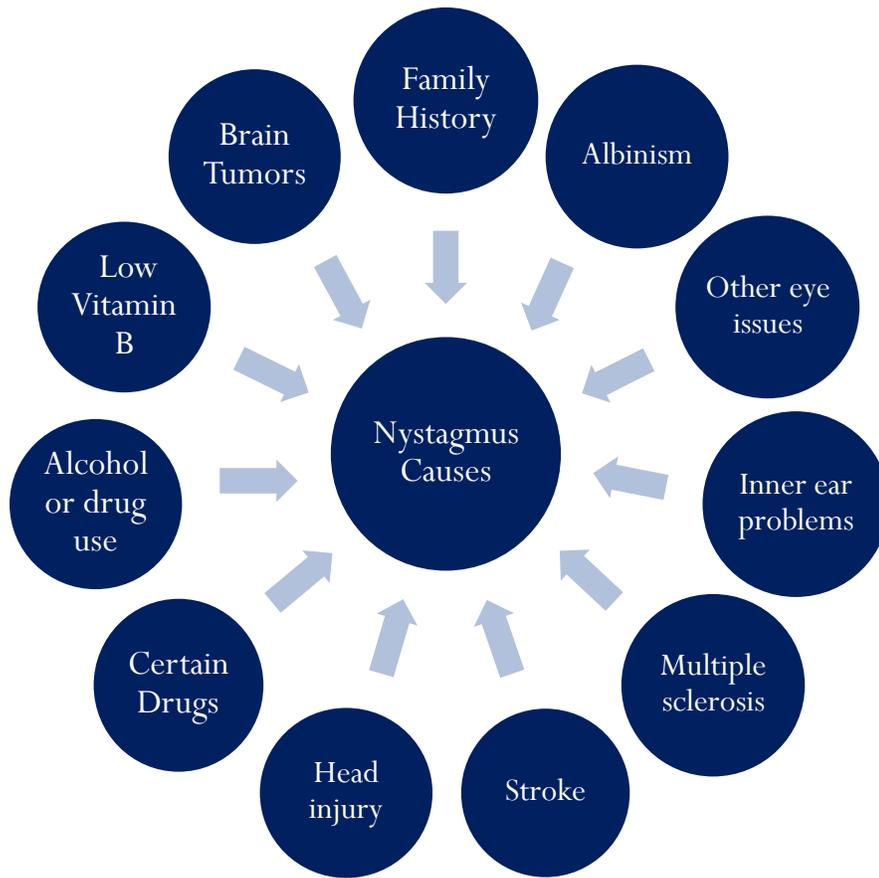


There are two types of nystagmus. **Congenital nystagmus** starts in infants, usually between 6 weeks and 3 months of age. In some cases it is genetic, however the exact cause isn't always clear. Children with congenital nystagmus usually have it in both eyes, it is typically mild and the main symptom is blurry vision.



**Acquired nystagmus** develops later in life. The condition is usually caused by an underlying health condition, like MS, or drug and alcohol use. Adults with acquired nystagmus often describe their vision as “shaky.”

The brain controls eye movement. Typically, the eyes move automatically to adjust when a person moves their head slightly. This stabilizes the image that is being viewed so it is sharper. In people with nystagmus, the areas of the brain that control eye movements do not work properly. This can be due to many different things:



As mentioned earlier, the main symptom of nystagmus is rapid eye movement that cannot be controlled. Other symptoms include light sensitivity, night blindness, dizziness/balance issues, or a shaking sensation. These symptoms may worsen when an individual is tired or stressed. People with nystagmus often hold their head in a tilted or turned position. This improves focus and helps things look clearer.

Nystagmus can be diagnosed with a [comprehensive eye exam](#), which is usually performed by an ophthalmologist. He or she may run a number of tests, including a neurological examination, eye-movement recordings, an ear exam, or brain



imaging scans, such as a [Computerized Tomography](#) (CT) or [Magnetic Resonance Imaging](#) (MRI). Another simple way to test for nystagmus involves spinning an individual around for 30 seconds, then stopping and asking them to stare at an object. If nystagmus is present, their eyes will move slowly in one direction, then quickly in the other.

The best treatment for nystagmus depends on the cause of the condition. Acquired nystagmus can sometimes be corrected once the underlying condition is addressed. For example, if nystagmus is caused by an inner ear condition, symptoms may go away once that condition is treated. Congenital nystagmus typically disappears as a child grows. There are a number of different ways to manage or treat this troubling condition in the meantime:



Glasses or contact lenses - Clearer vision can help slow the rapid eye movements associated with nystagmus.



LASIK - While laser eye surgery doesn't cure nystagmus, it improves vision and nystagmus symptoms may be reduced as a result.



Medications - Gabapentin, Baclofen and Botox can reduce nystagmus symptoms in adults. These medications are not used to treat nystagmus in children.



Surgery can be done to reposition the muscles that move the eyes, allowing the head to be in a more comfortable position. This helps to limit eye movement.

There are a number of things that can be done at home to make it easier to live with "dancing eyes."

## Tips for living with nystagmus:



Abstain from alcohol



Work in good lighting.



Adjust the brightness, color and font size when using a computer to optimize viewing.



Read large print books, when possible.



Use a highlighter or line marker when reading to keep your place.



Take frequent breaks when reading for long periods of time.



Wear tinted glasses or wear a hat indoors and out to reduce glare, as needed.



Make sure glasses or contacts are always up to date to improve vision as much as possible.



Develop a comfortable explanation for family and friends to help them understand nystagmus.

In addition, for children living with nystagmus, it may help to allow them to hold books close to their eyes with their head tilted. Big, brightly colored toys will be easiest for them to play with, as well as those that make noise or have unique textures. It's important to talk to their teachers to make things easier at school. Providing them with individual books and worksheets is of utmost importance as sharing these resources would be a challenge. Allowing them to choose where to sit so they can see the board and the teacher may also be helpful.

The symptoms of nystagmus can make daily tasks more challenging and impact one's quality of life. For example, some people with nystagmus find that their condition prevents them from driving, inhibits their ability to participate in certain activities/jobs or perform personal care tasks. While the condition can't be cured completely, there are treatments that can help. Many people learn to live with nystagmus and minimize its impact on their daily lives. Nystagmus can be linked to serious health issues, so it's important for individuals experiencing changes in their vision to consult with a physician right away. He or she will be able to run a variety of tests to make an accurate diagnosis and suggest effective treatment or management strategies.

