

5

facts about physiotherapy and Huntington's disease



1

Huntington's disease is not just a hyperkinetic movement disorder

Symptoms of Huntington's disease (HD) include:

- irregular, involuntary hyperkinetic movements of the limbs, known as chorea
- bradykinesia, akinesia and dystonia
- hypokinesia and rigidity as the disease progresses
- cognitive, behavioural and psychiatric symptoms.



2

Exercise can stabilise motor function in people with HD

Recommendations for safe, feasible and effective exercise include:

- prescribing moderate intensity aerobic exercise paired with upper and lower body strengthening
- considering potential barriers and what form of exercise will maximise engagement for the patient.



3

Gait training and respiratory management are vital for HD patients

Physiotherapists can:

- provide gait retraining as part of a holistic training program that includes balance and strength to improve walking speed
- work within a multidisciplinary team to optimise seating and postural management, particularly at mealtimes
- encourage good oral hygiene to reduce risk of chest infections
- train family/carers to manage choking incidents.



4

Assistive technology and mobility aid prescription for patients with HD should be considered carefully

Mobility aids and assistive technology that are individualised to the client's needs, goals and environment include:

- falls detection devices/alarms and reclining chairs
- four-wheeled walkers to support clients with mid-stage HD
- HD-specific mobility aids including tilt-in-space manual wheelchairs and transfer devices.



5

Physical and cognitive factors are associated with falls in HD

To reduce falls risk and manage falls, physios need to take into account:

- injury prevention strategies such as home set up, mobility aids, wearable protection and training family/carers
- potential difficulties in learning to safely use walking aids
- the impact of strategies on behavioural, cognitive and psychiatric symptoms.



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