



Every ALS Journey Is Different

# Understanding Your Condition Is The First Step Forward

Helpful Information For Those  
Newly Diagnosed With ALS

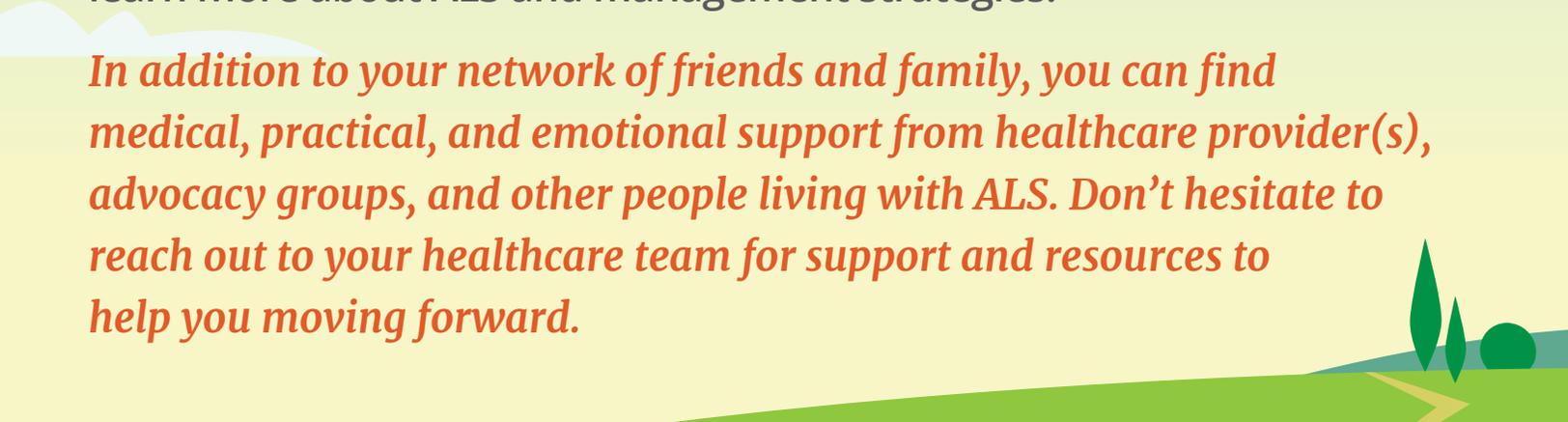
# Support for the Road Ahead



Receiving a diagnosis of ALS can be overwhelming. There's a lot to learn, many questions to ask, and important decisions you'll need to make along the way.

Remember that the more you know, the better equipped you will be to make informed decisions about your health. This brochure was designed to help do just that – so that you better understand your diagnosis. With the knowledge of your healthcare team, you can also learn more about ALS and management strategies.

*In addition to your network of friends and family, you can find medical, practical, and emotional support from healthcare provider(s), advocacy groups, and other people living with ALS. Don't hesitate to reach out to your healthcare team for support and resources to help you moving forward.*



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# The Basics of ALS

The more you learn about your disease, the better prepared you'll be for the path ahead.

## What is ALS?

Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) is a nervous system disease that affects physical function and may also include cognitive changes.

ALS begins in the brain and spinal cord by affecting nerve cells called **motor neurons**.

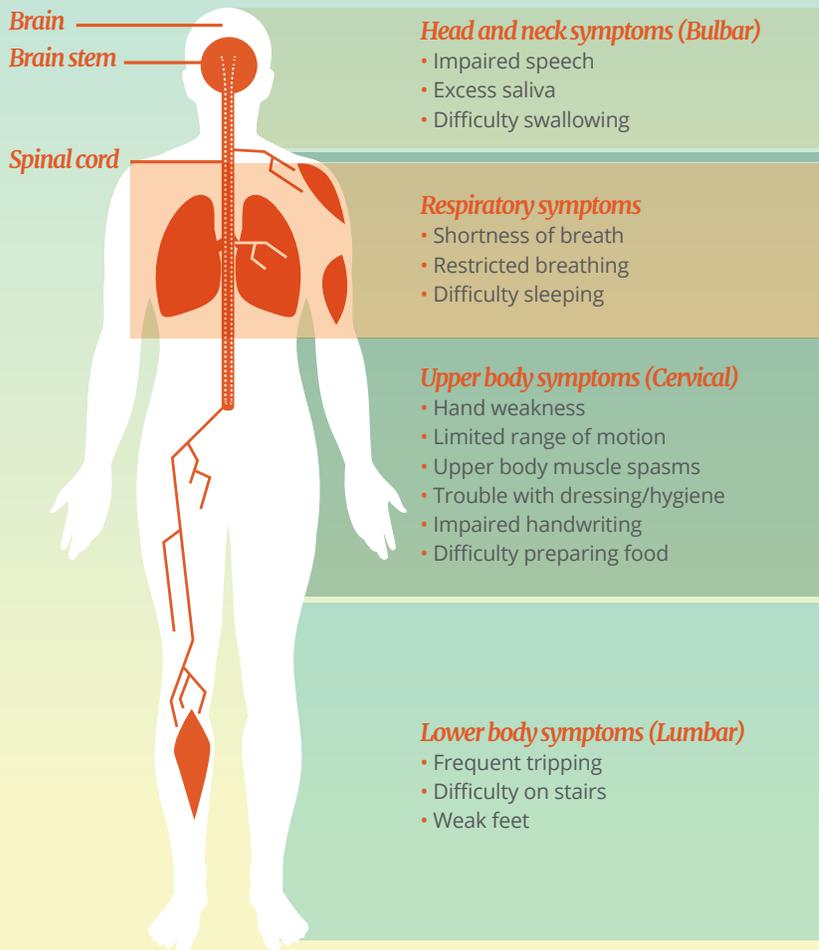
These motor neurons send commands from the brain to muscles throughout the body, allowing us to produce movements like walking, chewing, talking, and even breathing.

In people with ALS, these motor neurons stop working, cutting off this line of communication. Eventually, the brain loses its ability to control certain muscle movements, resulting in paralysis.

ALS is a progressive disease, meaning that symptoms get worse over time. People with ALS gradually lose their strength and muscle function, which can limit their ability to live independent lives.

## *Did you know?*

*ALS is also called Lou Gehrig's disease, named after the famous New York Yankees baseball player who was diagnosed with the disease in 1939.*



Some symptoms of impaired cognitive changes include a change in personality, conducting in inappropriate, embarrassing behaviour or in a childlike manner, making inappropriate comments, difficulty making decisions, impairments in thinking, reasoning or problem solving and changes in language processing (such as improper use of grammar, difficulty spelling or speaking)

## Symptoms of ALS

Symptoms vary from person to person and can appear in different regions of the body.

The number and degree of symptoms typically increase as the disease gets worse. Eventually, people may become incapable of movement and rely on caregivers for complete assistance.

People with ALS usually maintain control of bladder and bowel functions. Additionally, their senses of sight, touch, hearing, taste, and smell typically remain unaffected.

**Speak with your healthcare provider(s) about all symptoms you may be experiencing.**

# Monitoring Your Disease



Tracking your disease progression may help you plan for what's to come.

## Tracking Disease Activity

Several clinical tools that help monitor ALS symptoms have been developed, including questionnaires based on your function, as well as tests that measure strength and breathing capacity. These tools are important to understand how ALS is affecting your body and how quickly it's progressing.

## The ALSFRS-R Scale

One of these tools is called the ALS Functional Rating Scale-Revised (ALSFRS-R). The ALSFRS-R is a questionnaire that measures changes in a person's physical function over time, from climbing stairs and using utensils to breathing and swallowing.

The ALSFRS-R is the most widely used test in clinical trials to track ALS and is considered the gold standard.

*The higher your score, the more function you have. The more slowly your score declines over time, the more slowly your disease is progressing.*

## Why Your Score Matters

Your ALSFRS-R score can help you know how well your body is functioning. Understanding your physical function is important for two reasons:

### 1. Quality of Life

There is a strong connection between how well your body is functioning and quality of life. Generally, the better you're able to move, the more independence you'll retain.

### 2. Survival

The rate at which ALS worsens can be used to estimate survival time. Preserving physical function is believed to help patients live longer.

## Your Score is Personal

Remember, no two people with ALS are alike. Even if two people with ALS have the same overall score, ALS could still be affecting different regions of their bodies. For instance, take Steven and Mary.\*



**Steven**

**ALSFRS-R Score:** 42

**Symptoms:** Difficulty writing and cutting food



**Mary**

**ALSFRS-R Score:** 42

**Symptoms:** Difficulty speaking and swallowing food

\* Steven and Mary are hypothetical patients.

# Living with ALS

Receiving the right support may help you make the best decisions every step of the way.

## Communication is Key

Because ALS affects every person differently, it's important to communicate regularly with your healthcare provider(s).

It's also important to maintain an open and honest dialogue with your caregivers, as well as to reach out to advocacy groups. They can help you manage your disease and provide emotional support.

## Explore Multidisciplinary Care

In addition to working with your doctor or neurologist, you can find multiple experts under one roof at many ALS clinics.

Many ALS clinics provide multidisciplinary care, meaning you can find healthcare providers with different specialties that work together on your behalf to create a personalized care plan.

## *Did you know?*

*Multidisciplinary care can help provide timely interventions for ALS and help improve your mental and social well-being.*



For More

Information

Visit [ALSPathways.ca](https://www.alspathways.ca)

## Learn About Helpful Interventions

As ALS gets worse, the muscles involved in vital body functions, such as eating and breathing, can weaken and make these tasks more challenging.

Fortunately, certain interventions can assist with eating and breathing that may enhance quality of life and help prolong survival.

Discussing with your healthcare provider(s) the best time to start these interventions (and others like them) may help you stay ahead of your disease.



### Proper Nutrition

Keeping a healthy nutritional balance is important to enhancing your strength and energy.

Your healthcare provider(s) will consider a range of options, from consuming high-calorie food and liquids to using a percutaneous endoscopic gastrostomy (PEG) tube that is inserted directly into the stomach.



### Breathing Function

As the muscles involved in respiration (breathing) weaken, it becomes harder to breathe. Respiratory failure is the leading cause of death in ALS, so it's important to intervene early.

Many patients begin receiving respiratory support through noninvasive ventilation (NIV). As ALS progresses, more invasive options may be required, such as a tracheostomy, which is a surgically created opening in the trachea.

## Tips for Managing ALS

You're not defined by ALS. These tips may help you cope with and manage your disease.



**Set personal goals:** Decide which goals and aspirations are most important to you, and stick to them. Concentrate on the people and things you love.



**Stay connected:** Surround yourself with family, friends, and the things you love.



**Ask for help:** If you ever have a question or need help with a task, don't hesitate to ask your healthcare provider(s) and/or caregiver.



**Customize your home:** Consider modifying your home to be more accessible and easier to navigate.



**Plan your next steps:** Before leaving the house, always double-check that you have what you need to be prepared.



**Consider your mental health:** A trained professional can help you and your loved ones cope with emotions you're feeling.



The information provided here is general in nature and is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical or diagnostic advice. You are strongly encouraged to seek the advice of your doctor or other qualified healthcare provider with any questions regarding a medical condition.



## Make Your Next Steps Count



**Plan Ahead:** Anticipate and address your future everyday needs. These can include prepping your home to make living with ALS easier.



**Be Ready to Act:** Talk to your doctor about the steps you may need to take to deal with advanced ALS symptoms down the road. This way you'll know what to expect and when to take action.



**Find Your Care Team:** Seeking multidisciplinary care may help ensure that you have a comprehensive, personalized plan for treating ALS.

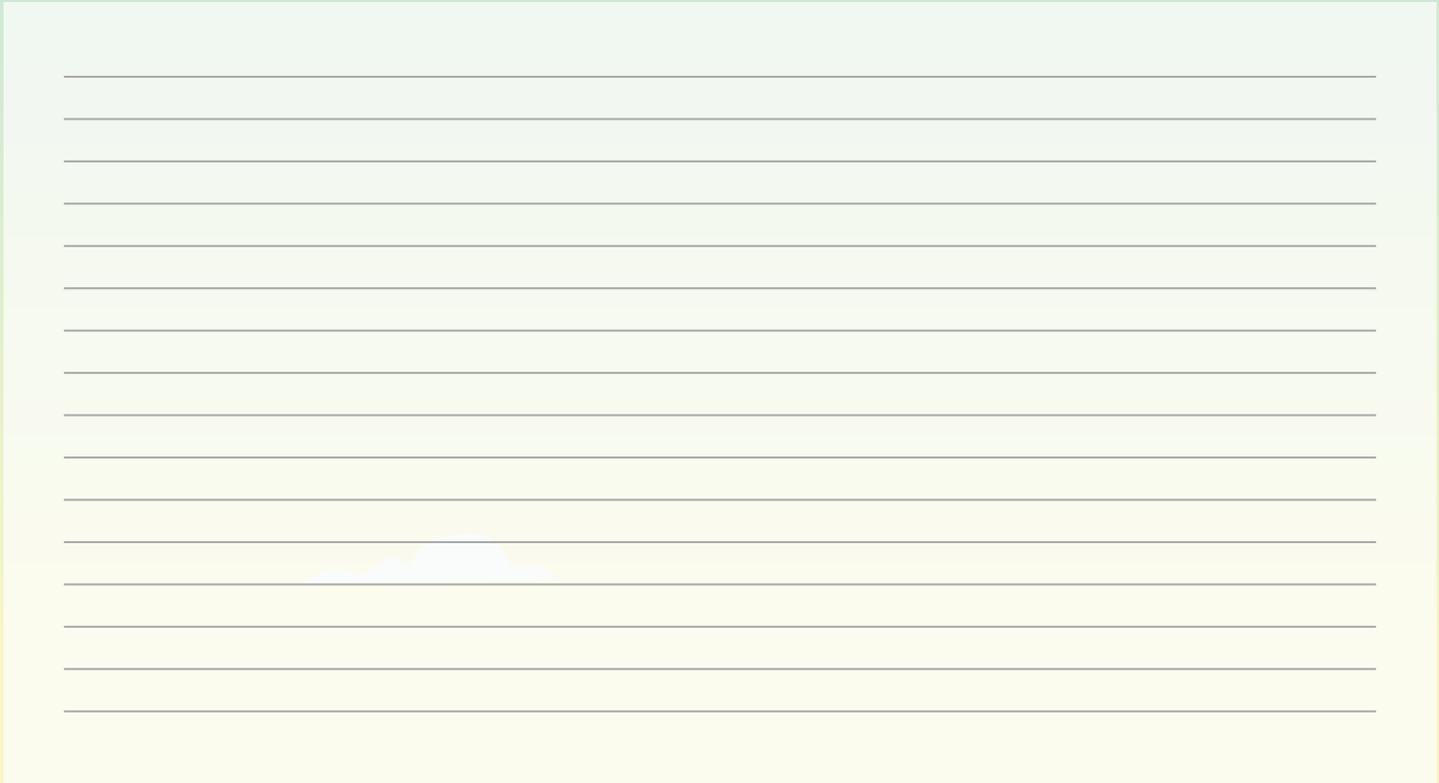


**Take Advantage of Valuable Resources:** There are many helpful organizations that provide education, support services, patient advocacy, and research.

**Please talk to your ALS healthcare provider(s) about patient service groups and programs available online and in your area.**

## Take Notes

As you speak with your healthcare provider(s), use the space below to take note of any additional tips or best practices they recommend. If you have difficulty writing, ask a caregiver or loved one to take notes for you.



A large white rectangular area with horizontal lines for taking notes. The lines are evenly spaced and cover the entire width of the area. There is a small white cloud graphic at the bottom center of this area.

For more information on ALS, as well  
as tools and resources for caregivers,  
visit **ALSPathways.ca**



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