Ataxia Clinic

Cerebellar ataxia is a broad clinical term that covers a wide variety of genetic, sporadic, and neurodegenerative disorders. While dozens of different disorders cause ataxia, they are similar in that they all impact a patient’s ability to walk, talk, and use their limbs. Because of the wide range of causes, a specific diagnosis is often difficult to determine for patients – limiting their options for treatment. Finding a specific cause of ataxia is important in order to develop a treatment plan for patients. Even for those causes of ataxia that are not curable, there are a number of pharmacological and non-pharmacologic treatment options available that can improve ataxia symptoms and quality of life.

Symptoms
The onset of ataxia ranges from childhood to late adulthood. Genetic causes of ataxia often start during childhood or early adulthood, although these disorders can develop later in life in some patients. Symptoms related to ataxia include:

• Trouble walking and falls
• Tremor
• Hand incoordination
• Slurred speech
• Double vision
• Jerky eye movements
• Trouble swallowing

Other symptoms that may be present in some ataxic disorders include:

• Impaired cognitive skills
• Sensory loss
• Muscle weakness and/or spasticity
• Fluctuations in blood pressure
• Loss of bladder and/or bowel control

Our Clinic
At UAB, our goal is to help physicians in the diagnosis and management of patients with ataxia. The clinic emphasizes the importance of expert clinical assessment to determine the cause of ataxia. Evaluation may involve laboratory testing, brain imaging, genetic testing, and neurophysiological testing. Genetic counseling will be offered to patients and family members where a genetic cause is suspected and/or confirmed. Physical, occupational, and speech therapists are available to help patients maximize their functional abilities and quality of life.

For Referring Physicians
The UAB Ataxia Clinic is held in the Neurology Clinic, and is located on the 5th floor of the Kirklin Clinic of UAB Hospital, 2000 19th Street South, Birmingham, AL, 35233.

To refer a patient, or for physician-to-physician consultation, please call UAB MIST at 800.UAB.MIST (1.800.822.6478).

For more information, visit us online at uabmedicine.org.

Visit our MD Learning Channel at learnmd.uabmedicine.org for web-based learning and video presentations from our UAB Medicine specialists.