

Digestive problems

These are common as the muscles of the digestive system may be affected. This may lead to:

- Swallowing problems (which can be a cause of food entering the lungs).
- Pains in the bowels with constipation and diarrhoea.
- Gallstones, which can cause painful spasms after eating fatty food, can be a problem in myotonic dystrophy.

Eye problems

Cataracts can cause blurring and dimming of vision. This may be the only problem that myotonic dystrophy causes.

Droopy eyelids can cause a problem with reading and watching television. You should have regular checks at the optician and see a medical eye specialist if there is any concern.

Other problems

- Male fertility problems.
- Diabetes (we recommend a urine test once a year).
- Pregnancy problems (the muscles in the womb can be involved, leading to an increased miscarriage risk or to a long labour).
- When myotonic dystrophy is present at birth, muscle involvement can be very severe. Babies may live only a short time.
- Speech, educational and behavioural problems can occur, especially when myotonic dystrophy begins in childhood.

Anaesthetics and surgery

People with myotonic dystrophy may have problems with surgery when certain anaesthetic drugs are used.

Make sure the surgeon and anaesthetist know about your myotonic dystrophy before an operation.

They may wish to contact a specialist centre for advice. Carry an Alert Card in your wallet or purse or wear a Medic Alert bracelet or necklace at all times in case of an accident or emergency. You can obtain a free card from the Myotonic Dystrophy Support Group (see contact details).

Inheritance

- Myotonic dystrophy is caused by a genetic change that can run in families. Other family members are frequently affected.
- It can affect and be passed on by both sexes, but women with the condition are more at risk of having a seriously affected child.
- Accurate genetic tests are possible for healthy young adults who are at risk of developing myotonic dystrophy because they have an affected relative.
- Tests are also available in pregnancy.
- Before having a genetic test for myotonic dystrophy, it is important to see a genetic counsellor to find out all the facts.