SYMPTOM

Twitching eyes and muscles

Twitching eyes and muscles are brief, involuntary movements that may flutter under the skin or move part of the body.

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE
A flutter under the skin or a sudden small jerk

WHERE IT IS FELT
Eyelids, face, arms, legs, or other muscles

MOST COMMON CAUSES
Stress, tiredness, caffeine

WHEN IT IS URGENT
New weakness, numbness, or trouble speaking, breathing, or swallowing

USUALLY LASTS
Seconds at a time, often settling within days or weeks

SEE A DOCTOR IF
Twitching lasts over two weeks, spreads, or keeps returning

Overview

A muscle twitch is a movement you do not choose to make. It may be so small that you only feel a flutter, or strong enough to move part of your body.

Small twitches caused by individual muscle fibres are called fasciculations . A fine, rippling eyelid twitch is often called eyelid myokymia . A sudden, larger jerk is called myoclonus . These terms describe types of movement, not their cause.

Most brief eyelid and muscle twitches are linked to tiredness, stress, caffeine, exercise, or eye irritation. Less often, repeated twitching can be related to a medicine, a body chemistry problem, or a condition affecting nerves or muscles.

What it may feel or look like

You may notice:

The movement may last only a few seconds but return many times. Eyelid twitching can continue on and off for days or weeks.

Twitching is different from a tremor , which is usually a repeated, rhythmic shaking movement. It is also different from a muscle cramp, which is a painful tightening that lasts longer.

- Fine fluttering or rippling under the skin
- A brief eyelid movement, often in the lower lid
- A sudden jerk of an arm, leg, shoulder, or the whole body
- Twitching that comes and goes in the same place
- Several small movements after exercise or while resting

Common causes

Common triggers include stress, lack of sleep, physical exhaustion, and caffeine. Hard exercise can also cause temporary twitching, especially in muscles that have recently been used.

Eyelid twitching may be triggered by dry or irritated eyes, long periods of screen use, bright light, or eye strain. Alcohol and nicotine may make twitching more noticeable for some people.

Brief jerks as you are falling asleep are common. These are sometimes called sleep starts or hypnic jerks.

Less common causes include certain medicines, low levels of some minerals in the blood, thyroid problems, and nerve irritation. Mineral changes are more likely after ongoing vomiting, diarrhoea, heavy sweating, or use of medicines that affect fluid balance. Do not stop a prescribed medicine without medical advice.

Repeated eyelid closure involving both eyes may be blepharospasm , a condition in which the eyelid muscles contract uncontrollably. Twitching that spreads down one side of the face may be hemifacial spasm , which can happen when a facial nerve is irritated.

Conditions affecting the brain, spinal cord, nerves, or muscles can also cause twitching. These are less common and usually cause other changes, such as progressive weakness, muscle loss, altered sensation, poor coordination, or difficulty speaking or swallowing.

When to seek medical care

Call emergency services if twitching occurs with:

These symptoms need emergency assessment and should not be watched at home.

Arrange urgent, same-day medical advice if twitching is accompanied by new muscle weakness, numbness, difficulty walking, or marked stiffness. You should also seek urgent

advice if widespread twitching begins with fever, agitation, or confusion after starting or changing a medicine.

Book a routine appointment if the twitching lasts longer than about two weeks, keeps returning, spreads to several areas, or interferes with sleep or daily activities. An eyelid twitch should also be checked if the eye closes completely, the eyelid droops, or the eye becomes red, swollen, painful, or produces discharge.

- Sudden facial drooping, one-sided weakness, or trouble speaking
- Difficulty breathing or swallowing
- Loss of consciousness or repeated whole-body jerking without recovery
- A severe, sudden headache with weakness, confusion, or vision loss

How the cause is found

A clinician will ask where the twitching occurs, how long it lasts, and whether anything triggers it. They may ask about sleep, stress, caffeine, exercise, alcohol, recent illness, and medicines or supplements.

The examination may include muscle strength, reflexes, sensation, coordination, and the appearance of the muscles. An eye examination may be needed for persistent eyelid symptoms.

Many occasional twitches do not require tests. If symptoms persist or come with other changes, blood tests may be used to check mineral levels, thyroid function, or other possible causes.

An electromyogram , or EMG, records electrical activity in muscles and nerves. It may be considered when there is weakness, muscle loss, or uncertainty about the type of movement. Brain or spine scans are usually reserved for symptoms suggesting a problem in those areas.

Treatment and self-care

Treatment depends on the cause. For an occasional twitch without other symptoms, it may help to:

Avoid taking high-dose magnesium or other mineral supplements just for twitching unless a deficiency has been identified. Too much of a supplement can cause harm or interact with medicines.

If a medicine may be contributing, speak with a clinician or pharmacist rather than stopping it suddenly. Treating an underlying thyroid, mineral, nerve, or eye problem may reduce the twitching.

Persistent blepharospasm or hemifacial spasm may be treated by a specialist. Botulinum toxin injections can temporarily relax the affected muscles in some diagnosed conditions.

- Get regular sleep and allow recovery after hard exercise
- Reduce caffeine if you consume a large amount
- Take breaks from screens and manage eye strain
- Use lubricating eye drops if dry eyes are a likely trigger
- Eat regular meals and replace fluids lost through illness or exercise
- Keep a short record of timing, location, and possible triggers

What to expect

Twitching caused by stress, tiredness, exercise, or caffeine often settles after the trigger improves. It may return during another period of poor sleep or strain.

Persistent twitching does not automatically mean that a serious condition is present. Its importance depends on where it occurs, whether it is getting worse, and whether weakness, altered sensation, or other symptoms develop.

Common questions

Does an eyelid twitch damage the eye?

A simple eyelid twitch usually does not damage the eye or affect vision. Pain, redness, swelling, discharge, drooping, or changes in vision suggest that something else may need assessment.

Does twitching mean I have motor neurone disease or ALS?

Twitching alone is rarely enough to suggest one of these conditions. They more often cause progressive weakness, loss of muscle bulk, and difficulty with tasks. Arrange an assessment if twitching occurs with worsening weakness or muscle loss.

Should I take magnesium?

Not routinely. Low magnesium can contribute to muscle symptoms, but twitching has many other causes. Supplements are most appropriate when a deficiency or specific need has been identified.

Can anxiety cause twitching?

Stress and anxiety can increase muscle tension, disrupt sleep, and make normal body sensations more noticeable. Twitching should not automatically be attributed to anxiety if it persists or comes with other symptoms.

Sources

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