

Patient Information

Meige Syndrome

What is Meige Syndrome?

Meige Syndrome is a rare neurological condition that causes **involuntary muscle contractions (dystonia)**, primarily affecting the **face and neck**. It most commonly involves a combination of:

- **Blepharospasm** – involuntary spasms of the muscles around the eyes, causing excessive blinking or forced eyelid closure
- **Oromandibular Dystonia** – spasms of the jaw, mouth, tongue, or lower face muscles

These muscle contractions can be intermittent or continuous and may interfere with daily activities such as reading, speaking, eating, or driving. Meige Syndrome typically begins in **middle to late adulthood** and is **more common in women** than men.

What Causes It?

The **exact cause of Meige Syndrome is unknown**, but it is believed to be due to **abnormal functioning of the basal ganglia**, a region of the brain involved in controlling movement.

Potential contributing factors include:

- **Genetic predisposition** (although most cases are not inherited)
- **Environmental triggers**, such as long-term use of certain medications (e.g. antipsychotics or anti-nausea drugs)
- Co-existing movement disorders such as other **forms of dystonia**

Meige Syndrome is **not caused by psychological illness**, although symptoms may worsen with stress, fatigue, or anxiety.

Who is Affected?

- Typically affects adults between the **ages of 40 and 70**
 - More common in **females**
 - Rare in children or young adults
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Symptoms

Meige Syndrome often begins gradually and progresses over time. Common symptoms include:

Blepharospasm (Eye Symptoms):

- Excessive blinking
- Difficulty keeping eyes open
- Uncontrollable eyelid closure (can cause temporary functional blindness)

Oromandibular Dystonia (Mouth and Jaw Symptoms):

- Jaw clenching or opening
- Lip pursing or retraction
- Tongue thrusting or difficulty controlling tongue movements
- Grimacing or facial twitching
- Difficulty speaking (dysarthria)
- Problems chewing or swallowing (dysphagia)

In some cases, spasms may extend to the **neck (cervical dystonia)** or **larynx**, affecting voice and posture.

How is it Diagnosed?

Meige Syndrome is a **clinical diagnosis**, based on the patient's symptoms and physical examination. There is no specific test to confirm the condition.

The diagnostic process may include:

- **Neurological examination** to assess muscle movements and rule out other conditions
- **Imaging tests** (such as MRI) to exclude structural brain abnormalities
- Review of **medical history**, including medication use
- Sometimes, **electromyography (EMG)** may be used to assess muscle activity

Diagnosis may be delayed or misattributed to conditions such as dry eye syndrome, anxiety disorders, or temporomandibular joint dysfunction (TMJ).

Treatment Options

There is no cure for Meige Syndrome, but symptoms can often be significantly improved with medical and supportive treatments.

1. Botulinum Toxin Injections (Botox)

- **First-line treatment** for both blepharospasm and oromandibular dystonia
- Injections are administered into the overactive muscles to **reduce spasms**
- Effects begin within a few days and typically last **3–4 months**
- Repeat treatments are usually necessary
- Side effects are generally mild and may include temporary weakness in nearby muscles or slight asymmetry

2. Oral Medications (less commonly effective)

Used when Botox alone is insufficient or not tolerated. These may include:

- **Anticholinergics** (e.g. trihexyphenidyl)
- **Benzodiazepines** (e.g. clonazepam)
- **Baclofen** (a muscle relaxant)
- **Tetrabenazine** (dopamine-depleting agent)

These medications may help reduce the severity of spasms but can cause side effects such as drowsiness, dry mouth, or cognitive changes.

3. Surgical Options (in rare, severe cases)

For patients who do not respond to other treatments:

- **Deep Brain Stimulation (DBS)**: Electrodes are implanted in specific brain areas to modulate motor control. May reduce symptoms of dystonia.
- **Myectomy**: Surgical removal of overactive muscles (mainly used for severe blepharospasm)

Surgery is considered only in **highly selected cases**.

Coping and Lifestyle Tips

Living with Meige Syndrome can be challenging, particularly due to its impact on communication, vision, and self-image. These strategies may help:

- **Wearing tinted glasses** (FL-41 lenses) may reduce light sensitivity that triggers blepharospasm
 - **Stress reduction techniques** (e.g. mindfulness, breathing exercises)
 - Use of **adaptive devices** or **assistive communication tools** during flare-ups
 - **Hydration and nutrition support**, particularly if eating is affected
 - Involvement in **patient support groups** for emotional and practical advice
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Prognosis

Meige Syndrome is a **chronic condition**, but it does **not shorten life expectancy**. Symptoms tend to progress slowly and may plateau over time. While it can be disabling, especially in severe cases, many patients achieve a good level of symptom control with treatment.

When to Seek Medical Advice

Contact your doctor if you experience:

- Persistent blinking or facial twitching
- Difficulty keeping your eyes open
- Unexplained facial, mouth, or jaw spasms
- Trouble speaking, eating, or swallowing

Early recognition and referral to a **neurologist with expertise in movement disorders** can lead to effective treatment and improved quality of life.

Summary

Feature	Description
Condition	Meige Syndrome
Symptoms	Involuntary spasms of the eyes, jaw, mouth, and sometimes neck
Cause	Neurological dysfunction (dystonia of facial muscles)
Diagnosis	Clinical assessment by neurologist
Treatment	Botulinum toxin injections (first-line), oral medications, surgery in rare cases
Prognosis	Chronic but manageable with treatment

Support and Resources

UK-Based:

- **Dystonia UK**
www.dystonia.org.uk
Information, support, and connections to specialist care.
- **British Neurological Association**
Offers patient education and clinician directories.

International:

- **Dystonia Medical Research Foundation (DMRF)**
www.dystonia-foundation.org
Offers information on treatment, clinical trials, and patient networks.
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