What is dystonia after a brain injury?

Dystonia is a movement disorder that does not allow the brain and muscles to communicate. This causes the muscles to move and contract involuntarily. This may be mild or severe and may interfere with daily tasks. The movements may be painful, and some individuals with dystonia may have a tremor or other neurologic symptoms.

There are several different forms of dystonia that may affect only one muscle, or groups of muscles throughout the body. There is currently no cure for dystonia. Dystonia is one of many symptoms that an individual may experience after a brain injury, and it may not appear until several months after the injury.

What are the symptoms?

- Dystonia symptoms following a brain injury often affect the side of the body opposite of the side of the brain injury.
- Dystonia can cause muscles in the body to contract or spasm involuntarily, resulting in twisting, repetitive movements and abnormal postures. This often results in pain and cramping.
- Individuals who are affected by dystonia have difficulty controlling or predicting the movement of their bodies. Early symptoms may include loss of fine motor control, frequent small injuries to the hands, dropping items, trembling, or pain and cramping from very minor exertions.

What treatments are available?

Currently, there are no medications available to prevent dystonia or slow its progression. There are, however, several treatment options that can help with the symptoms. Doctors can select the best approach based on each individual. Treatments may include:

- Oral medications
- Rehabilitative therapy
- Neurological surgery
- Botulinum neurotoxin injections

Remember:

- Seek out medical care from a neurologist and medical team with experience in treating brain injuries and movement disorders. Learn about all treatment options.
- Find and use a good support system of family, friends and professionals.
- Stress does not cause dystonia, however many people with dystonia have reported that their symptoms worsen in stressful situations. This worsening is temporary and resolves when the stressful situation has passed. Techniques that result in reducing the stressful feelings may be beneficial. Relaxation techniques and moderate exercise may be of considerable help.