



# Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis

**For Prelims:** Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, [Neurodegenerative Disease](#), [National Policy for Rare Diseases \(NPRD\)](#), [World Health Organization](#).

**For Mains:** Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis and Challenges with it.

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## Why in News?

Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), a debilitating [Neurodegenerative Disease](#), presents a range of challenges for both patients and caregivers in India.

- Despite its rare occurrence, ALS profoundly impacts the **lives of those affected due to its progressive nature** and lack of effective treatment.

## What is Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS)?

### ▪ About:

- ALS is a rare and **fatal type of motor neuron** disease. It is characterized by **progressive degeneration** of nerve cells in the spinal cord and brain.
  - It's often called **Lou Gehrig's disease**, after a famous baseball player who died from the disease.
- ALS is one of the most **devastating of the disorders** that affects the function of nerves and muscles.
- As motor neurons degenerate and die, they stop sending **messages to the muscles**, which causes the muscles to weaken, start to twitch (fasciculations), and waste away (atrophy).
- Eventually, the brain loses its ability to initiate and control **Voluntary Movements**.
  - The **movements** that are **under our control** are called voluntary actions, such as walking, running, sitting etc.
  - On the other hand, the movements that **are not under our control are called involuntary movements**.

### ▪ Causes:

- Causes are not yet, in a few cases, **genetics is involved**.
- ALS research is looking into **possible environmental causes of ALS**.

### ▪ Symptoms:

- With ALS, there may be **weakness in a limb that develops over a matter of days** or, more commonly, a few weeks. Then, several weeks to months later, weakness develops in another limb. Sometimes the initial problem can be one of slurred speech or trouble swallowing.

### ▪ Treatment:

- There is no cure and proven treatment for ALS.

## What are the Initiatives to Tackle ALS?

- The Government's [National Policy for Rare Diseases \(NPRD\)](#), 2021, introduced a significant provision offering **financial aid of up to Rs. 50 lakh to patients afflicted by Rare Diseases** and receiving treatment at designated Centers of Excellence.
  - The [World Health Organisation \(WHO\)](#) characterizes rare diseases as debilitating conditions with a prevalence of 1 or less per 1000 population.
- This policy initiative aims to support individuals, including **those with conditions like ALS**, by providing **substantial financial assistance** for their treatment.

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