

## Managing Daily Life with Ataxia

### Creating a Safe Home Environment

- Make your home safer by removing trip hazards such as loose rugs and electrical cords.
- Install good lighting throughout the house, especially in hallways and bathrooms. Add handrails on both sides of stairways and grab bars in the bathroom near the toilet and shower. Use non-slip mats in the shower and bathtub. Consider using a raised toilet seat to make transfers easier.
- Keep frequently used items within easy reach. Choose lever-style door handles and light switches, which are simpler to operate than small buttons or knobs.

### Preventing Falls

- Move slowly and carefully, especially when changing positions.
- Use walking aids like canes or walkers if recommended by your healthcare team.
- Wear sturdy shoes with good grip—avoid high heels or loose footwear.
- Take your time when getting up from chairs or beds.
- Ask for help with tasks that feel unsafe.

### Eating and Nutrition

- Maintain a balanced diet rich in vitamins and proteins to support overall health.
- Use utensils with larger, easier-to-grip handles
- Try weighted utensils to help with hand tremors

- Use cups with lids and straws to prevent spills
- Eat smaller, more frequent meals if swallowing is difficult
- Sit upright while eating and take your time
- If you have swallowing problems, work with a speech therapist on safe swallowing techniques.

### Exercise and Physical Activity

- *Regular exercise is important for people with ataxia, but it should be done safely. Encourage gentle, regular exercise as tolerated. Use mobility aids when needed.*
- *Simple balance exercises, walking with assistance, and stretching can help maintain muscle strength and flexibility. Always consult your healthcare team before beginning any new exercise program.*

### Communication and Speech

- If ataxia affects your speech:
  - – Speak slowly and clearly
  - – Take breaks during conversations
  - – Face the person you're talking to
  - – Use gestures to help communicate
  - – Consider using communication apps or devices if speech becomes very difficult
  - – Practice breathing exercises to support clearer speech
  - – Consult a speech therapist who can assist you with your speech difficulties.

## Personal Care

- Choose clothes that are easy to put on, such as those with Velcro or elastic waistbands.
- Sit down while dressing for better stability.
- Consider using slip-on shoes.
- Consider using an electric toothbrush or a toothbrush with a large handle.
- Consider using pump dispensers instead of bottles that need to be opened.
- Use a shower chair if standing is difficult, and handheld showers.
- Keep personal care items organized and easily accessible.

## Sexual Health

- People with ataxia may experience changes in sexual function and bladder control due to impaired nerve coordination and muscle control.
- Open, respectful communication is important—encourage discussions with healthcare providers about concerns such as reduced sensation, erectile difficulties, vaginal dryness, or incontinence. Simple strategies like planning intimate moments when energy levels are higher, using supportive positioning, and considering lubricants or prescribed treatments can help maintain comfort and intimacy.

## Bladder support

- Watch for urgency, frequency, or leakage
- Establishing regular toileting schedules, limiting bladder irritants (like caffeine), and doing pelvic floor exercises (if appropriate) may improve control. In some cases, continence products or medications may be recommended. Always seek medical advice if symptoms change, as proper management can greatly improve quality of life and dignity.

## Supporting Mental Health

Living with ataxia can be emotionally challenging:

- Talk to family and friends about how you're feeling
- Consider joining support groups for people with ataxia
- Don't hesitate to seek counseling if you're feeling overwhelmed and consider therapy if necessary.
- Stay connected with activities and people you enjoy

## Family and Caregiver Support

Caregiving can be physically and emotionally demanding:

- Take care of your own health and seek respite care when needed
- Learn proper techniques for assisting with transfers and daily activities to prevent injury to both you and your loved ones
- Join caregiver support groups to connect with others facing similar challenges

## REMEMBER

Ataxia affects everyone differently - your experience may be unique. Symptoms can change over time, so regular medical check-ups are important. Many people with ataxia continue to lead fulfilling lives with proper care and support. Research is ongoing, and new treatments may become available. Work closely with your healthcare team to develop the best approach for your specific situation.