
WHAT IS ALS?



AMYOTROPHIC LATERAL SCLEROSIS
SOCIETY OF CANADA
SOCIÉTÉ CANADIENNE DE LA
SCLÉROSE LATÉRALE AMYOTROPHIQUE

**“ALS is clearly the most common cause
of neurological death on an annual basis.”**

– Dr Michael Strong, *research scientist at the Robarts Research Institute, London, Ontario.*

WHAT IS ALS?

ALS, sometimes called Lou Gehrig’s Disease or Motor Neuron Disease, is a rapidly progressive fatal neuromuscular disease. It is characterized by degeneration of a select group of nerve cells and pathways in the brain and spinal cord, which leads to progressive paralysis of the muscles.

WHO GETS ALS?

ALS can strike anyone. ALS is not contagious, does not discriminate, and can strike at any age. The usual age of onset is between 55 and 65, but people under 20 have been diagnosed. ALS is usually fatal within three to five years of diagnosis. In the majority of cases the cause is unknown. In about 5-10% of cases there is a hereditary pattern.

WHAT ARE THE EARLY SYMPTOMS?

ALS usually becomes apparent either in the legs, the arms, the throat or the upper chest area. Some people begin to trip and fall; some lose the use of their hands and arms; some find it hard to swallow and some slur their speech.

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF ALS?

Because ALS frequently takes its toll before being positively diagnosed, many patients are debilitated before learning they have contracted ALS. The disease does not usually affect the senses – taste, touch, sight, smell and hearing – or the mind. ALS wreaks a devastating effect on patients as well as their families. As they cope with the prospect of advancing disability and death, it consumes their financial and emotional reserves. It is a costly disease in its later stages, demanding both extensive nursing care and expensive equipment.

WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT ALS?

Although recent scientific research has resulted in significant new knowledge, much more research is needed to find a cure. Research is being conducted in areas relating to genetic predispositions, viral or infectious agents, environmental toxins, and immunological changes.

If you designate your donation to research it will go directly to fund research for better treatment and a cure for ALS.

IS THERE HOPE FOR PEOPLE WITH ALS?

There is no treatment that prolongs life significantly. Research is also investigating ways to reverse the disease. There may eventually be a cure for ALS. Many people with ALS say that they live life more fully now, with much joy even knowing what is to come. In the meantime, good planning and medical and social management can ease the burden on the person with ALS and family members.

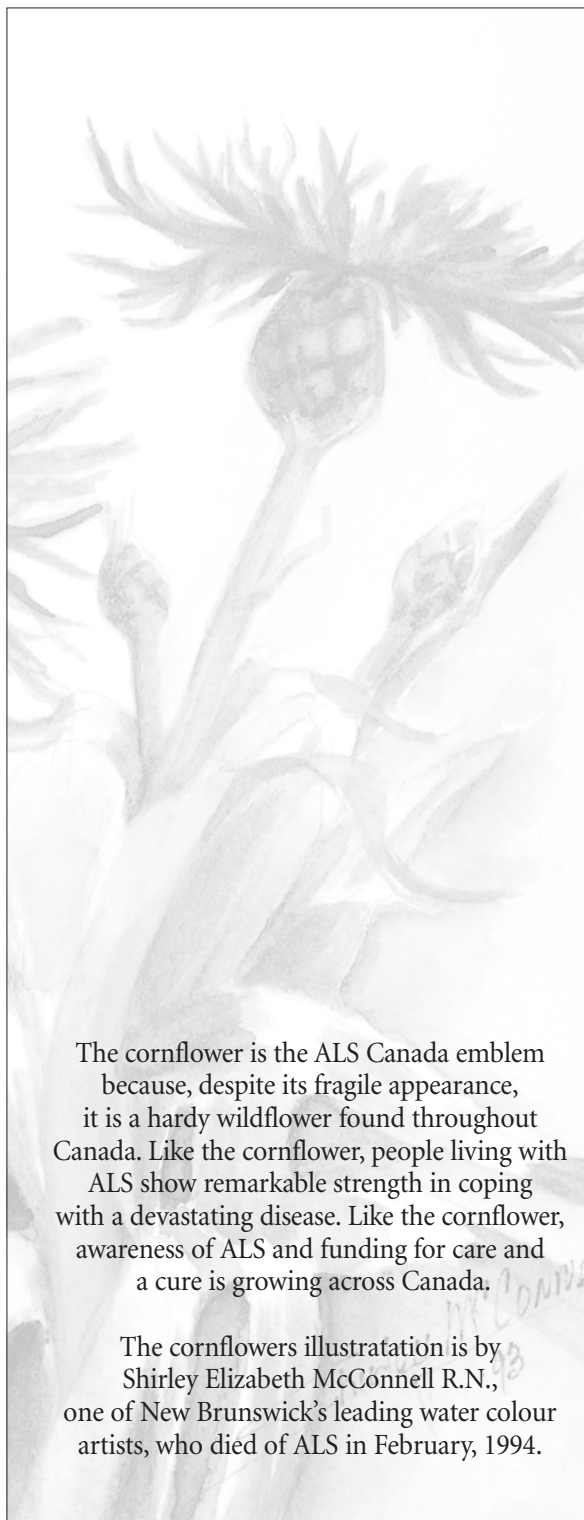
WHAT IS THE ALS SOCIETY OF CANADA?

The ALS Society of Canada is committed to provide care and find a cure for ALS. With our regional partners our mission is:

- To provide the best possible support for people with ALS, their families and care givers;
 - To support research into the cause of and cure of ALS;
 - To build public awareness of ALS and its impact.
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ALS FACT SHEET

- Today ALS kills two to three Canadians a day.
- According to Statistics Canada, from 1994 to 1996 deaths due to ALS were 94% higher than deaths from cystic fibrosis, 70% greater than multiple sclerosis, and only 15% less than AIDS.
- This means that twice as many people a year die of ALS than cystic fibrosis and multiple sclerosis combined.
- Between 1,500 and 2,000 Canadians currently live with ALS.
- According to the latest Statistics Canada data, in 1996 1110 people died of ALS. (This is a conservative number as ALS may not always be listed as the primary cause of death.)
- June is ALS Month.
- Sometimes called Lou Gehrig's disease, it is named after the famous US baseball player who died of ALS in 1941.
- Ninety percent of people with ALS die within five years of a diagnosis.
- ALS can strike anyone. It can hit at any time, regardless of age, sex or ethnic origin.
- In at least ninety percent of cases, it strikes people with no family history of the disease.
- A person with ALS will require an average of \$137,000 in equipment. Nursing care can exceed ten times that amount.
- The cause is unknown.
- There is no treatment that prolongs life significantly.
- There is no cure – yet.



The cornflower is the ALS Canada emblem because, despite its fragile appearance, it is a hardy wildflower found throughout Canada. Like the cornflower, people living with ALS show remarkable strength in coping with a devastating disease. Like the cornflower, awareness of ALS and funding for care and a cure is growing across Canada.

The cornflowers illustration is by Shirley Elizabeth McConnell R.N., one of New Brunswick's leading water colour artists, who died of ALS in February, 1994.

For further information about available resources, services and support, contact the
ALS SOCIETY OF CANADA



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