

## **Benign Essential tremors (BET) – (Also known as familiar tremors)**

**Definition** - Is a benign movement disorder characterized mainly by shaking of the hands. It can also cause tremors or shaking of the voice and head and less likely of the trunk or legs. The symptoms occur more commonly with use of the hands during activities such as writing or eating.

**Causes** - Although we are not clear what causes BET, half of the cases are genetic (runs in the family). When inherited is called familiar tremor.

**What to expect?** - Although not a dangerous condition it tends to progress with time. It isn't caused by other diseases, although it's sometimes confused with Parkinson's disease. Essential tremor can occur at any age but is most common in older adults.

**Risk factors** - A risk factor is something that increases your chances of getting a disease. Family history is the only known risk factor. The condition occurs more commonly after age 40. It is often made worse by stress, lack of sleep, anxiety, hyperthyroidism, and certain medicines including steroids, stimulants and some pulmonary and cold medicines.

**Diagnosis** - There is not an x-Ray or blood test needed to make the diagnosis. Your doctor may want to perform some test to rule out other causes of tremulousness.

**Treatment** - Many patients do not necessarily require any treatment if the symptoms are mild and do not affect the activities of daily living. Medicines that can help include:

1 - *Beta-blockers* - like propranolol; effective, but can drop the heart rate and blood pressure. This class of drugs may not be an option if you also have asthma, diabetes or certain heart problems.

2 - *Antiseizure medicines* - including primidone (Mysoline), gabapentin (Neurontin) and topiramate (Topamax) - The main side effects are drowsiness and flu-like symptoms, which usually disappear within a short time.

3 - *Sedatives and tranquilizers* - These could be particularly useful for patients that the tremors are made worst by stress or anxiety. They can cause drowsiness and be habit forming.

4 - *Botox*, physical therapy and surgery can be considered for more severe cases.

**Other Measures** - Always remember to consult with your pharmacist and other doctors about your medicines. Also stay well rested, avoid caffeinated drinks, stress and extreme temperatures. While a glass of alcohol beverage can temporary improve the tremors, it's best to drink sparingly or not at all.