

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER. LEARN ALL YOU CAN ABOUT FA

While getting a diagnosis of FA might be tough, you can take charge and learn all you can about the disease. With the right support and care team, you can deal with the challenges that come your way and stay as active and engaged as possible.

What is FA?

Friedreich's ataxia (pronounced FREED-ricks ah-TACKS-ee-ah), or FA, is a rare condition that occurs in 1 in every 50,000 people in the United States. It can be a hard disease to understand. In simple terms, FA is a rare disease that mainly affects your nervous system and heart.

What happens in FA is that it damages the nerves in your brain and spinal cord, impacting the communication between your brain and your body. Most people with FA start to have symptoms around or before puberty (10 to 15 years of age).

This results in a loss of muscle control, causing problems such as awkward and unsteady movements. While everyone has different symptoms, the first symptoms that usually appear are having a hard time walking and general clumsiness.

What happens as FA progresses?

It's important to keep in mind that no 2 people with FA are alike. Everyone will have their own experiences with FA symptoms and how the disease impacts them over time. Here are some of the common symptoms of FA that you may experience or are currently experiencing.

People living with FA may experience:



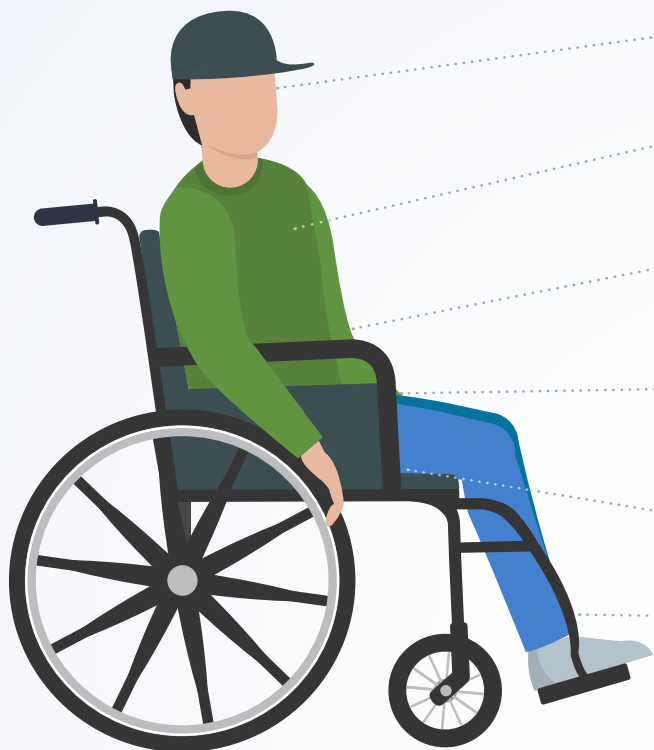
- **Problems with speech and swallowing**
- **Spasticity (muscle spasms)**
- **Skeletal abnormalities**
 - A common symptom early on for up to two-thirds of people with FA is developing scoliosis, which is a curving of the spine to one side
- **Trouble walking, frequent tripping, unable to perform in sports**

The Care Circle Flashcard can give you more information about which members of your care team can help you manage your FA symptoms.

Keep reading to learn more about the symptoms of FA.



People with FA may also experience:



- **Hearing and vision problems**

- A common problem that can be socially limiting

- **Heart issues**

- A majority of people with FA have some kind of heart disease, such as enlargement of the heart (cardiac hypertrophy) and heart failure

- **Reflex and sensory loss**

- A very common symptom, with most people losing the ability to sense vibration and the position of their joints

- **Impaired glucose tolerance or diabetes mellitus**

- People with FA are at an increased risk for these and should have their blood sugar levels tested once a year

- **Bladder problems**

- Feeling a strong need to urinate and needing to urinate more often

- **Weakness**

- Muscles in the legs usually become weak

Many people with FA use walking aids and often require a wheelchair

Because the most common symptom of FA is difficulty walking, many people with FA turn to walking aids, such as canes, crutches, and wheeled walkers. Most people need to use a wheelchair within 15 years after diagnosis. These aids can help you maintain your independence so you can keep doing what you love, for as long as possible. Your physical or occupational therapist can help you find the right mobility device for you. **For more information, refer to the Care Circle Flashcard.**

Whatever you face with FA, know that you are not alone. You can get involved, stay active, and find the support you need. To learn more or to join the community, visit the **Friedreich's Ataxia Research Alliance (FARA)** at **CureFA.org**.