

# the MUSCULAR DYSTROPHY ASSOCIATION


## AND ITS FIGHT AGAINST ALS!

This year, as many as 5,000 people will be diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), commonly known as Lou Gehrig's Disease, which is a fatal neurological disease that attacks the nerve cells responsible for controlling voluntary muscles.

ALS is one of the most common neuromuscular diseases worldwide, and people of all races and ethnic backgrounds are affected. In ALS, nerve cells that control muscle cells are gradually lost. In most cases, the cause is unknown. As these motor neurons are lost, the muscles they control become weak and then nonfunctional. Eventually, the person with ALS is paralyzed. Death, usually from respiratory complications, typically comes between three and five years after diagnosis.

ALS usually strikes in late middle age (the late 50s is average) or later, although there have been cases of ALS in young adults and even in children, as well as in very elderly people. Some genetic forms of ALS have their onset in youth. The disease usually announces itself with persistent weakness or spasticity in an arm or leg, causing difficulty using the affected limb, or in the muscles controlling speech or swallowing, leading to difficulty with these functions. It isn't unusual for people to ignore such problems for some time (perhaps months) at this stage or to consult a physician who may be relatively unconcerned.

No cure has yet been found for ALS, and although ALS research is proceeding at an unprecedented pace, only one medication has been found to be somewhat effective against the disease and is approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration as an ALS treatment. That medication, riluzole (brand name Rilutek), has a modest effect in prolonging survival.

The Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA) is making a tremendous difference in the fight against ALS. Since the early 1950s, when Eleanor Gehrig served as a national volunteer leader of MDA, the association has led the effort to assist those affected by the disorder that takes its name from her husband, baseball great Lou Gehrig, who died of ALS in 1941. Since 1950, the association has invested more than \$230 million in its ALS program. 

*MDA's ALS division website at [www.als-mda.org](http://www.als-mda.org) contains thousands of pages of valuable information, including ALS research and care, clinical trials and articles. If you have any questions about ALS, someone at MDA will help you find the answer. To reach your local MDA office, call 704-567-2912.*