

32963

HEALTH



**TREMORS THAT TURN DAILY
ROUTINES INTO CHALLENGES**

HEALTH

Tremors that turn daily routines into challenges

BY SIOBHAN MCDONOUGH
Staff Writer

Ruth Weimer's head bobbles, her hands and fingers shake, and her voice wavers. She relies on a cane to keep her balance, and writing a check is an insurmountable task. At 89, such movements might be chalked up to old age. But her 68-year-old daughter, Judy Cox, shakes a bit as well, and her 41-year-old granddaughter is also showing early signs of a disorder known as essential tremor.

Ruth's son Jim Weimer, 67, observes members of his family and wonders what may be in store for him. He even recalls an uncle, now deceased, who shook, but at the time, no one had a label or a reason for it.

Genetics does play a role in essential tremor, but the root cause of the condition remains unknown. Still, the Sebastian family with ET in common wants to learn more.

Last week at the Moorings, a University of Florida expert talked about ET at a conference sponsored by the

county's Alzheimer and Parkinson Association – ET isn't related to Parkinson, though some patients have both conditions.

"ET is much more genetic, much more inheritable than Parkinson's disease," said David Vaillancourt, professor of applied physiology, neurology and biomedical engineering at the University of Florida, who spoke on the latest findings on ET. "People have kids and parents, and when things are genetic, they get concerned."

He says ET can affect the way people eat, brush their hair, apply makeup and work. "It can force early retirement, prevent promotions at work and complicate social interactions," Vaillancourt said. "It affects more than your movements. It affects your emotional wellbeing."

ET affects the hands mostly, but it can affect the legs, arms, head and voice as well. Although it is not a dangerous condition, the symptoms do worsen over time. It mostly occurs in people over 40.

Some 4.5 million Americans have

essential tremor, making it the most common movement disorder. It generally shows up as a rhythmic tremor that occurs only when the affected muscle is exerting effort. Any sort of physical or mental stress will tend to make the tremor worse.

Tremor is a normal phenomenon experienced by everyone, the quiver people see when they hold out their hands, for example. Pathological tremors, by contrast, are extreme enough to interfere with normal functioning.

The high incidence of ET in the Weimer clan is far from the exception: in most cases the disease runs in families: a child of someone with ET has a 50-50 chance of also having the illness.

"When you see your son or daughter or parent having that issue, it becomes a more personal problem."

That is certainly the case for Cox. "We'd like to see something happen, so that at least my daughter and her generation don't have to deal with this the way we have to – knowing there is nothing we can do to stop the condition from getting worse."



Dr. David Vaillancourt at the conference last week.

Researchers in the last five years or so have been starting to pinpoint where in the brain ET is affecting people, an important step in finding treatment options.

"Until you know that, it is difficult to think of different treatments that may

Beachside Dental
What if your visit to the dentist was the most relaxing hour of your day?

Don't let fear of the dentist prevent you from achieving and maintaining a beautiful, healthy smile. Call Beachside Dental today for a comfortable, stress-free dental appointment. We are pleased to offer advanced & controlled sedation techniques - including IV Conscious Sedation - for your comfort. We work with most insurances.

"The New Patient Experience"
\$97 Exam & necessary low radiation digital X-rays*

Why Choose Us?

- We serve Kids & Adults of All Ages
- Calming Sedation Dentistry
- Restorative Services including Implants, Crowns & Dentures
- Cosmetic Services including Teeth Whitening & Veneers
- Comfortable, Relaxed Atmosphere

772.234.5353
www.beachsidedental.com
5070 N A1A
Indian River Shores - Suite E
In the Oak Point Building
Next to CVS

Matthew J. Henry, DDS & Team

*D0330, D0274, D0190. THIS IS A MINIMUM FEE ONLY. THE PATIENT AND ANY OTHER PERSON RESPONSIBLE FOR PAYMENT HAS A RIGHT TO REFUSE TO PAY, CANCEL PAYMENT, OR BE REIMBURSED FOR PAYMENT FOR ANY OTHER SERVICE, EXAMINATION, OR TREATMENT THAT IS PERFORMED AS A RESULT OF AND WITHIN 72 HOURS OF RESPONDING TO THE ADVERTISEMENT FOR THE FREE, DISCOUNTED FEE, OR REDUCED FEE SERVICE, EXAMINATION, OR TREATMENT.

Take away headache pain...

...and take back your life.

One focus, one specialty, one mission: helping patients to live headache-free.

R. Michael Gallagher, D.O., FAHS, FCPP, FACOPF distinguished, a recognized authority in headache treatment, provides diagnosis, treatment and following up care for chronic headache sufferers.

NOT a "pain clinic," the Center specializes in both non-medicinal and non-narcotic medicinal treatments. Learn about headache triggers, self help and more at www.CenterforHeadacheCare.com.

321-775-0550
2351 W. Eau Gallie Blvd., Ste. 2
Melbourne, Florida 32935

CENTER FOR HEADACHE CARE

HEALTH

work for ET," said Vaillancourt.

Currently, there have been some advances in its neuropathology, involving taking post-mortem tissue samples from donated brains to see what part is affected by ET. This was done decades ago in Alzheimer's and Parkinson's research.

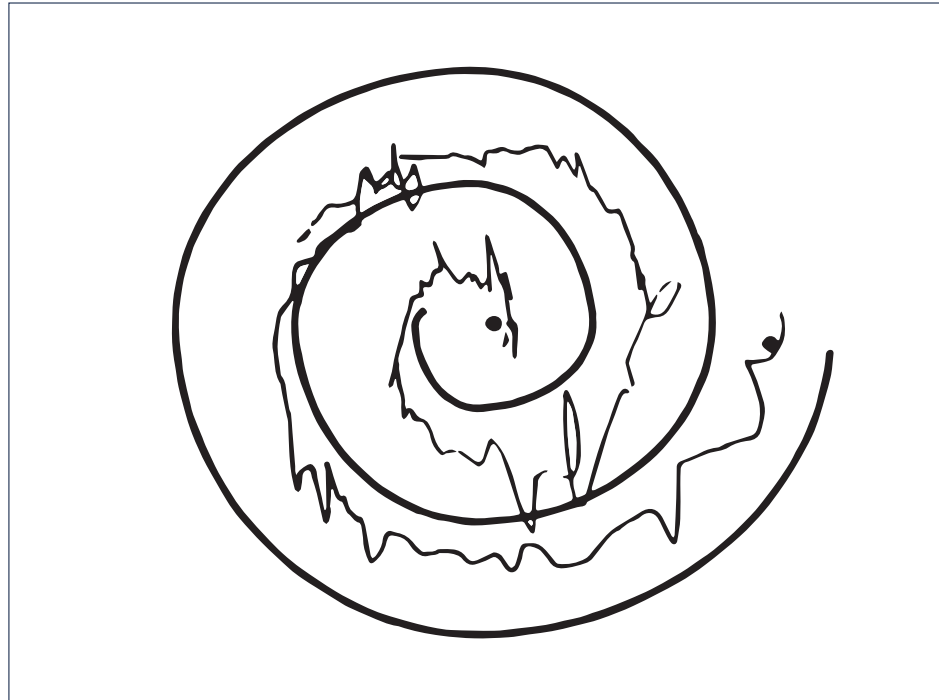
There have also been advances in neuroimaging techniques that look into the living brain to see what part is affected.

It is clear that the cerebellum is a key brain region for ET. How it is involved remains less clear. According to recent studies, the motor cortex is more excited in ET patients. Neurons over-firing cause the involuntary movements.

"This is something that should be fixable," Vaillancourt said. "In comparison to the other diseases, it has received little attention in research and funding communities."

Not everyone with ET requires treatment, but for those who do, there are some options depending on the severity of the symptoms.

When symptoms are sufficiently troublesome, beta blockers are often prescribed first, and the anti-epileptic primidone is also effective for ET. About half of patients respond to such medications.



An example of a how someone with ET attempts to draw a spiral.

Second-line or third-line medications can be added if the first-line medications don't control the tremor.

When medications do not control the tremor or the patient does not tolerate the drugs, doctors consider deep brain stimulation, considered the biggest breakthrough in ET treatment. Unfortunately, it isn't applicable to all

patients with the condition.

The surgical treatment involves the implantation of a medical device called a brain pacemaker, which sends electrical impulses to specific parts of the brain.

Joan Marie Barringer, who leads an essential tremor support group at Vero's Alzheimer and Parkinson Foun-

ation, outlined some tactics during the conference, including meditation, positive self-talk, Qi gong, massage, music and art therapy as well as a diet rich in fruits and vegetables.

Barringer, 59, was diagnosed at age 32 but experienced symptoms when she was only 5. Trying to color inside the lines of a coloring book was a huge challenge to her as her hands shook. Classmates thought she was nervous. Her mother had essential tremor but was not diagnosed until late in life.

"I was a straight-A little kid but had trouble writing," she said, as well as difficulty navigating the balance beam in gym class.

Barringer helps others cope with the ill effects of their essential tremor.

"There is so much embarrassment and guilt for people who have it," she explained. "They can suffer from social phobia. People see you as kind of weak."

"It's important for people to know about ET," said Peggy Cunningham, executive director of the county's Alzheimer and Parkinson Foundation. "Don't deny it, learn the strategies. If you put all of the strategies together, you can see improvements in the mindset and in doing exercises, and tasks." ■



The new
Kurtell Medical Center

Under new management.

All suites are being remodeled to suit.
New flooring, tile, wood, carpet, paint,
and marble counter tops.

COME SEE OUR
NEW MODEL!

3 year lease offered (no annual increases) at \$14.95/sq. ft plus small cam.

777 37th St. Suite A-103 • Vero Beach, FL 32960 • 772-567-8500

