

ALS

Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, also called Lou Gehrig's disease - a chronic and rapidly progressive disease that attacks brain cells that control the muscles. As these cells die, the muscles weaken and shrink, become paralysed. First affected are voluntary muscles (legs, arms), then involuntary muscles, (diaphragm, heart). The brain loses its ability to communicate with the muscles, but thought processes remain intact.

ALS is non-contagious, adult-onset and rare among individuals under 45 years of age. There is no known cure for ALS.

The VA and DOD funded a study by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) regarding ALS among veterans which was published in September 2003. After examining over 2.5 million cases, the scientists concluded that veterans who served in the Persian Gulf were almost twice as likely to develop ALS as those who did not serve in the Gulf War Theater.

A second study, done by Dr. Robert Haley at University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, also published in September 2003, concluded that Gulf War veterans were more than twice as likely to suffer with ALS as the general population, but also that the rate of ALS among veterans increased with each passing year.

Notable from both studies: veterans who developed ALS after serving in Southwest Asia were frequently younger than the expected age of ALS patients.

In 2003, the VA started a registry for veteran ALS victims. Information is on: http://www.research.va.gov/news/press_releases/lou-gehrig-021803.cfm.

The ALS Association has a paper titled *ALS in the Military. Unexpected Consequences of Military Service*, at http://www.alsa.org/files/pdf/ALS_Military_Paper.pdf.

For more information on ALS, visit the website of the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke: http://www.ninds.nih.gov/health_and_medical/pubs/als.htm. Also, check out:

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For information on other neurological disorders or research programs funded by the national Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, contact the Institute's Brain Resources and Information Network (BRAIN) at: BRAIN, P.O. Box 5801, Bethesda, MD 20824, (800)352-9424, <http://www.ninds.nih.gov>