muscle groups that are not required for a given movement (overflow). Dystonia is characterized by derangement of the basic physiological principle of action-selection, leading to abnormal recruitment of inappropriate muscles for a given action with inadequate inhibition of this undesired motor activity. Physiologically, loss of inhibition is observed at multiple levels of the motor system (e.g., cortex, brainstem, spinal cord) accompanied by increased cortical excitability and reorganization. Attention has focused on the basal ganglia as the site of origin of at least some types of dystonia because there are alterations in blood flow and metabolism in these structures. Further, lesions of the GPi can induce dystonia, and surgical ablation or DBS of the globus pallidus can ameliorate dystonia. The dopamine system has also been implicated, because dopaminergic therapies can both induce and treat some forms of dystonia. Interestingly, no specific pathology has been consistently identified in primary dystonia.

TREATMENT DYSTONIA

Treatment of dystonia is for the most part symptomatic except in rare cases where correction of a primary underlying condition is possible. Wilson's disease should be ruled out in young patients with dystonia. Levodopa should be tried in all cases of childhood-onset dystonia to rule out DRD. High-dose anticholinergics (e.g., trihexyphenidyl 20–120 mg/d) may be beneficial in children, but adults can rarely tolerate high doses because of side effects related to cognitive impairment with hallucinations. Oral baclofen (20–120 mg) may also be helpful, but benefits, if present, are usually modest, and side effects of sedation, weakness, and memory loss can be problematic. Intrathecal infusion of baclofen is more likely to be useful, particularly for leg and trunk dystonia, but benefits are frequently not sustained, and complications can be serious and include infection, seizures, and coma. Tetrabenazine (the usual starting dose is 12.5 mg/d and the average treating dose is 25–75 mg/d) is another consideration, but use may be limited by sedation and the development of parkinsonism. Neuroleptics can improve as well as induce dystonia, but they are typically not recommended because of their potential to induce parkinsonism and other movement disorders, including tardive dystonia. Clonazepam and diazepam are rarely effective.

Botulinum toxin has become the preferred treatment for patients with focal dystonia, particularly where involvement is limited to small muscle groups such as in blepharospasm, torticollis, and spasmodic dysphonia. Botulinum toxin acts by blocking the release of acetylcholine at the neuromuscular junction, leading to reduced dystonic muscle contractions, but excessive weakness may ensue and can be troublesome particularly if it involves neck and swallowing muscles. Two serotypes of botulinum toxin are available (A and B). Both are effective, and it is not clear that there are advantages of one over the other. No systemic side effects are encountered with the doses typically used, but benefits are transient, and repeat injections are required at 2- to 5-month intervals. Some patients fail to respond after having experienced an initial benefit. This has been attributed to antibody formation, but improper muscle selection, injection technique, and inadequate dose should be excluded.

Surgical therapy is an alternative for patients with severe dystonia who are not responsive to other treatments. Peripheral procedures such as rhizotomy and myotomy were used in the past to treat cervical dystonia, but are now rarely used. DBS of the pallidum can provide dramatic benefits for patients with primary DYT1 dystonia. This represents a major therapeutic advance because previously there was no consistently effective therapy, especially for these patients who had severe disability. Benefits tend to be obtained with a lower frequency of stimulation and often occur after a relatively long latency (weeks) in comparison to PD. Better results are typically obtained in younger patients with shorter disease duration. Recent studies suggest that DBS may also be valuable for patients with focal and secondary dystonias, although results are less consistent. Supportive treatments such as physical therapy and education are important and should be a part of the treatment regimen.

Physicians should be aware of dystonic storm, a rare but potentially fatal condition that can occur in response to a stress situation such as surgery in patients with preexisting dystonia. It consists of the acute onset of generalized and persistent dystonic contractions that can involve the vocal cords or laryngeal muscles, leading to airway obstruction. Patients may experience rhabdomyolysis with renal failure and should be managed in an intensive care unit with airway protection if required. Treatment can be instituted with one or a combination of anticholinergics, diphenhydramine, baclofen, benzodiazepines, and dopaminergic agents. Spasms may be difficult to control, and anesthesia with muscle paralysis may be required. Most, if not all, cases of dystonic storm are due to a secondary cause.

CHOREAS

HUNTINGTON'S DISEASE (HD)

HD is a progressive, fatal, highly penetrant autosomal dominant disorder characterized by motor, behavioral, oculomotor, and cognitive dysfunction. The disease is named for George Huntington, a family physician who described cases on Long Island, New York, in the nineteenth century. Onset is typically between the ages of 25 and 45 years (range, 3–70 years) with a prevalence of 2–8 cases per 100,000 and an average age at death of 60 years. It is prevalent in Europe, North and South America, and Australia but is rare in African blacks and Asians. HD is characterized by rapid, nonpatterned, semipurposeful, involuntary choreiform movements, and for this reason was formerly referred to as Huntington's chorea. In the early stages, the chorea tends to be focal or segmental, but progresses over time to involve multiple body regions. Dysarthria, gait disturbance, oculomotor abnormalities, behavioral disturbance, and cognitive impairment with dementia are also common features. With advancing disease, there tends to be a reduction in chorea and the emergence of dystonia, rigidity, bradykinesia, and myoclonus. Functional decline is often predicted by progressive weight loss despite adequate calorie intake. In younger patients (~10% of cases), HD can present as an akinetic-rigid or parkinsonian syndrome (Westphal variant). HD patients eventually develop behavioral and cognitive disturbances, and the majority progress to dementia. Depression with suicidal tendencies, aggressive behavior, and psychosis can be prominent features. HD patients may also develop non-insulin-dependent diabetes mellitus and neuroendocrine abnormalities (e.g., hypothalamic dysfunction). A clinical diagnosis of HD can be strongly suspected in cases of chorea with a positive family history, but genetic testing provides the ultimate confirmation of the diagnosis. The disease predominantly affects the striatum. Progressive atrophy of the heads of the caudate nuclei, which form the lateral margins of the lateral ventricles, can be visualized by MRI (Fig. 449-8), but the putamen can be equally or even more severely affected. More diffuse cortical atrophy is seen in the middle and late stages of the disease. Supportive studies include reduced metabolic activity in the caudate nucleus and putamen. Genetic testing can be used to confirm the diagnosis and to detect at-risk individuals in the family, but must be performed with caution and in conjunction with trained counselors, because positive results can worsen depression and generate suicidal reactions. The neuropathology of HD consists of prominent neuronal loss and gliosis in the caudate nucleus and putamen; similar changes are also widespread in the cerebral cortex. Intraneuronal inclusions containing aggregates of ubiquitin and the mutant protein huntingtin are found in the nuclei of affected neurons.

In anticipation of developing neuroprotective therapies, there has been an intensive effort to define the premanifest stage of HD. Subtle motor impairment, cognitive alterations, and imaging changes can be detected in at-risk individuals who later go on to develop the manifest form of the disease. Defining the rate of progression of these features is paramount for future studies of putative disease-modifying therapies.

ETIOLOGY

HD is caused by an increase in the number of polyglutamine (CAG) repeats (>40) in the coding sequence of the huntingtin gene located on