

E-Pearl of the Week

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Clues in the diagnosis of ET

Essential tremor (ET) is misdiagnosed in 30–50 percent of patients.¹ While all ET patients have tremor, not all action tremor is ET. Simple clues that can tell you that you are not likely to be dealing with an ET patient are as follows:

1. Postural tremor (e.g., arms extended) > kinetic tremor (e.g., finger to nose maneuver). The amplitude of kinetic tremor is generally greater than that of postural tremor in ET.²
2. Head tremor without arm tremor. Such patients are highly likely to have spasmodic torticollis (with head tremor and mild dystonic posturing) rather than ET.³
3. Postural arm tremor that is characterized mainly by wrist rotation. Flexion-extension at the wrist is more typical of ET; wrist rotation may be a feature of the postural tremor of Parkinson's disease.³

For more information, see:

1. Jain S, Lo SE, Louis ED. Common misdiagnosis of a common neurological disorder: how are we misdiagnosing essential tremor? *Arch Neurol* 2006;63:1100-1104.
2. Brennan KC, Jurewicz EC, Ford B, Pullman SL, Louis ED. Is essential tremor predominantly a kinetic or a postural tremor? A clinical and electrophysiological study. *Mov Disord* 2002;17:313-316.
3. Louis ED. Essential tremor. *Lancet Neurol* 2005;4:100-110.

Reference

Contributed by Elan D. Louis, MD, MS, FAAN, Columbia University.

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