

# Pseudobulbar Affect

## Definition

Pseudobulbar affect, or PBA, is a neurologic condition that causes sudden, involuntary outbursts of crying or laughing throughout the day. During a PBA episode, the emotions a person expresses may be exaggerated or different from the person's inner emotional state.

## Who has PBA and why

PBA can occur in people with an underlying neurologic condition—such as multiple sclerosis (MS), Lou Gehrig's disease (ALS), stroke, or traumatic brain injury. PBA outbursts result from a "short circuit" in the brain caused by the underlying neurologic condition.

## PBA is not depression

PBA episodes may look like symptoms of depression, and, as a result, PBA is often misunderstood. Unlike depression, however, PBA is a neurologic condition, not a psychiatric one. The episodes are often sudden and unpredictable.

The emotional expressions may be different from or exaggerations of the person's mood.

## Impact

PBA outbursts can be stressful and disrupt lives. In fact, many of those afflicted live less fully, not working and avoiding social things they would normally enjoy. Recognizing PBA can help improve your life, and the lives of those who care for you.

## Could you be suffering from PBA?

PBA outbursts result from a "short circuit" in the brain caused by another neurologic condition—such as multiple sclerosis (MS), Lou Gehrig's disease (ALS), stroke, or traumatic brain injury.

## Self Assessment:

1. Do you have a neurologic condition such as multiple sclerosis (MS) or Lou Gehrig's disease (ALS), or have you had a stroke or traumatic brain injury?  Yes  No
2. Do you burst out crying or laughing for no apparent reason?  Yes  No
3. Do you cry or laugh at inappropriate times?  Yes  No
4. Do you have outbursts of emotion that are exaggerated or inappropriate to the situation?  
 Yes  No
5. Do you find that even when you try to control your crying or laughing, you can't?  Yes  No

If you answered "yes" to the first question and 1 or more of the other questions, you may suffer from PBA and should consider talking to your doctor. As with any medical issue, you should share all of your symptoms with your doctor or healthcare professional. Only he or she can make a proper diagnosis.

## **Coping with PBA**

PBA episodes can certainly disrupt your life. Here are some suggestions on how you might regain a measure of control:

- Be open about it. Let people know that you cannot always control your emotions
- Distract yourself. If you feel an emotional episode coming on, try to focus on something unrelated
- Change your body position. Note the posture you take when having an episode. When you think you are about to cry or laugh, change it
- Breathe. Inhale and exhale slowly until you are in control
- Relax. Release the tension in your forehead, shoulders, and other muscle groups that tense up during an emotional episode

The above tips are not a substitute for medical advice from your doctor. Please discuss with your doctor additional ways to cope with episodes of PBA.

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