

Parkinson's Disease

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Parkinson's disease is a disorder that affects your ability to move.

Brain cells (neurons) communicate with your body by sending and receiving signals. These signals are sent using brain chemicals, such as dopamine. These signals control your speech, movement, thinking process and senses (hearing, sight and touch).

Parkinson's disease is caused by the loss of neurons that make dopamine. The reason why this occurs is not known.

Symptoms

Symptoms of Parkinson's disease often begin slowly and become worse over time. Your symptoms may be short-term or long-term. Some symptoms may go away and return later.

Your symptoms may include:

- trembling or shaking (tremors) in your hands, arms, legs, jaw and face
- stiffness in your arms, legs and upper body
- slowness of movement
- problems with coordination
- problems walking (shuffling)
- problems with balance and walking (falling)
- being unable to move
- stooped posture
- bloating and constipation (unable to have a regular bowel movement)
- overactive bladder and problems holding your urine (incontinence)
- problems with cognition, such as memory, thinking, attention or learning (dementia)
- sleep disorders
- head rush
- loss of smell
- anxiety
- depression
- personality changes
- problems swallowing, chewing and speaking.

Who Can Get Parkinson's Disease

Anyone can get Parkinson's disease. It is slightly more common in men than women. Symptoms often start around age 60.

How Parkinson's Disease is Found

A neurologist (doctor who treats diseases of the brain and nervous system) will check your symptoms and how bad they are.

No single test can confirm Parkinson's disease. You may need tests (brain scans) to help your neurologist find the cause of your symptoms.

Treatment

There is no known cure for Parkinson's disease. Treatment can help improve your quality of life. Together, you and your health care provider will decide how to best treat your symptoms.

Parkinson's disease can be treated with:

❑ **Medicine (levodopa, carbidopa, dopamine agonists)**

This helps replace dopamine in your brain.

❑ **Deep brain stimulation (DBS)**

This uses a small device called a neurostimulator. This device is implanted in your chest and sends electrical impulses through a wire lead to electrodes in your brain. This stimulation blocks abnormal signals that cause some symptoms.

Your health care provider may suggest DBS if your medicine no longer controls your symptoms well.

❑ **Exercise**

Do physical activities at least 5 days each week for 20 to 30 minutes. This will help protect your brain cells, strengthen your muscles, and improve your flexibility and balance. Physical activities include walking, swimming, running, biking and boxing.

If you do not have a regular exercise routine, talk with your health care provider before you start one.

❑ **An occupational therapist**

This person helps treat problems with doing everyday activities. These include eating, brushing your teeth, getting dressed, doing housework and going to the bathroom.

❑ **A physical therapist**

This person helps treat problems with your balance, coordination and walking. They will create a tailored treatment plan to fit your needs.

❑ **A speech therapist**

This person helps treat problems with swallowing, speaking, understanding, reading and writing. They may also help you with your attention span, problem-solving and memory skills.

What Members of Your Care Circle (Family, Friends and Others Close to You) Can Do

- Become involved with your health care.
 - Go with you to as many of your health care visits as possible.
 - Ask questions about health care topics that are not clear.
 - Talk with your doctor or pharmacist about medicine use, if needed.
- Remove anything from your home that could cause you to fall, such as:
 - rugs
 - furniture in hallways or near stairs
 - long or loose bedding.
- Help you stay independent as long as possible. As your symptoms become worse, you will need more help doing everyday activities.
- Install safety equipment as needed. This may include a bathroom tub, shower seat or grab bars.
- Encourage you to use aids, such as a walker or reachers.
- Join a support group.

Resources

For more information, visit:

- **Allina Health**
allinahealth.org
- **American Parkinson Disease Association**
apdaparkinson.org
- **National Parkinson Foundation®**
parkinson.org
- **Parkinson Alliance**
parkinsonalliance.org

Information adapted from the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke.