

Living with Parkinson's disease

This is a Help Sheet for people with Parkinson's disease. It explains some of the things you can do to manage your symptoms and live well.

Understand your condition

Understanding Parkinson's disease is the first step to managing its symptoms.

Parkinson's is a condition that affects movement. The problems you may experience are due to a breakdown of messages from the brain to the muscles of the body. The main symptoms are shaking, stiff muscles, slow movement and balance problems. Parkinson's affects each person differently and symptoms can vary on different days.

Seek expert health advice

It is very important that people with Parkinson's see a specialist doctor such as a neurologist.

Other health workers can provide support, information, treatment and therapies to help with daily living:

- **Physiotherapist:** for advice on movement and exercises to help make tasks easier and safer.
- **Occupational therapist:** for practical advice and equipment to make every-day tasks easier, such as eating, dressing and writing.
- **Speech therapist:** for advice on communication, such as ways to make your voice louder and clearer, and on managing swallowing difficulties.
- **Dietician:** to help you manage common problems like unplanned weight loss or constipation.

- **Counsellor,** psychologist, psychiatrist or social worker: for support in coping with the emotional effects of Parkinson's.

Look after yourself

Keeping yourself healthy will help you to manage living with Parkinson's. It will also give your body the best chance to cope with symptoms. Eating well and exercising regularly helps keep your muscles flexible and strong, helping with balance, posture and the way you move. One of the best exercises for people with Parkinson's is regular walking. You may also consider getting involved with a local strength training program.

Avoid constipation

Constipation is a common problem for people with Parkinson's. The bowel is a muscle and slow movement as a result of Parkinson's can cause constipation, affecting general health and wellbeing.

To avoid constipation:

- Drink plenty of fluids – at least 8 glasses of water a day
- Eat plenty of fibre, which is found in fresh fruit and vegetables, or use a supplement such as psyllium husks.

If constipation continues, talk to your doctor.

Get a good night's sleep

Parkinson's can be tiring, so it is important to get enough sleep. Sometimes, the condition and the medications used to treat it can keep people awake at night. Some people find that after a good night's sleep, their symptoms improve the next morning.



Some of the ways you can get a good night's sleep:

- Stick to a regular sleep routine.
- Avoid napping in the day.
- Use relaxation methods such as breathing or aromatherapy.
- Avoid stimulating drinks such as coffee before bed and try a relaxing herbal tea such as camomile.

If these methods are not working, talk to your doctor about medications that can help.

Learn and use movement strategies

People with Parkinson's can sometimes control their movement symptoms by thinking differently or by moving in a different way.

For example, for shaking or tremors:

- Try moving the body part that is shaking to a different position.
- Hold onto something to give you more stability.
- Press a shaking arm against your body.

For walking difficulties (such as shuffling or feeling stuck in one spot):

- 1. Stop** walking or stop trying to walk.
- 2. Relax** and take a full breath before you begin to walk again.

3. Start again:

- Look straight ahead or visualise a spot on the floor and try to step over it.
- Lift your feet and count each step.

A physiotherapist can provide you with techniques that may suit your individual situation.

Avoid falling over

People with Parkinson's are more likely to fall over because of difficulties with walking, balance and muscle weakness. Some medications can also increase the chance of falls due to lowering blood pressure. There are some simple strategies you can use to avoid falling:

- Wear comfortable, firm-fitting flat shoes with soles that grip.
- Make your home and surroundings as safe as possible.
- Think about different and safer ways of doing things that suit your abilities.

Look after your emotional wellbeing

It is common for people with Parkinson's to experience sadness or depression. It is important to talk about this with your doctor as this may be a treatable side-effect of medication.

Parkinson's brings many stresses and challenges and it is important to get emotional support – even if you do not feel depressed. It can help to meet or talk with other people who are going through the same experiences. There are also many organisations that can help with someone to talk to over the phone or in person and with practical help.

For further information & support contact:

Parkinson's Australia: 1800 644 189

To speak to us in a language other than English:

Phone: **131 450** and ask for an interpreter in your language to connect you to Parkinson's Australia in your state or territory. This is a free service.

This and other help sheets are available in a range of community languages. Contact us or download them from our website.

www.parkinsons.org.au

September 2008