

## Information for employees and employers

### Parkinson's and work

Work is an important part of most people's lives, and even after retirement age many like to volunteer or work part time.

Parkinson's is diagnosed at an average age of 60, when people are still in the workforce. Those diagnosed between the ages of 21 and 40 are described as having young onset Parkinson's.

While the diagnosis is often a shock, most people are able to continue working for some time after diagnosis – depending on their occupation.

Early symptoms can be very mild and not noticeable, and people with a new diagnosis often prefer to take their time adjusting to the news before sharing it. Parkinson's may also progress very slowly in people diagnosed at a younger age.

There is a range of specialist employment services – such as disability employment service providers – which can help businesses and organisations retain and support employees who have been diagnosed with Parkinson's.

Helping an employee make adjustments to continue in their position or transition to a more suitable work area or part-time employment helps an organisation retain corporate skills and knowledge. Making provision for employees' changing health needs is an important part of diversity and inclusion, building trust and commitment in a workplace.

### Work-related Parkinson's symptoms

**The most common symptoms of Parkinson's are all potentially obvious at work but may not be work health and safety issues in most jobs. The following symptoms are typical:**

- U Tremor – Stress and anxiety can worsen this, which may affect keyboard skills.
- U Bradykinesia (slowness of movement) – May affect a person's ability to meet tight deadlines and schedules. Understanding and cooperation from an employer is important in creating achievable schedules.
- U Handwriting may become smaller and less legible. An occupational therapist may be able to help if handwriting is important for work.
- U A person's voice can become softer. Vocal changes can make phone calls and office discussions more difficult, but speech therapy can help maintain good communication.
- U Fatigue is a major symptom which can affect an individual's ability to work full time. Breaking up the work week can help. For example, work two days then have a day of rest before working another two days.
- U Stress and anxiety can make other symptoms worse.

There are more than 50 different symptoms of Parkinson's and not everyone develops the same combination of symptoms – each person will present differently, and the disease progresses at different rates by individual. An occupational therapist can assess the work environment where necessary.

*With the right medication and support at work, people can remain productive and engaged for many years.*



## Disclosure

Many people diagnosed before retirement have family and financial commitments they need to consider before disclosing their condition at work.

There is no general obligation to disclose any medical condition unless there is an occupational health and safety risk relating to the condition.

Taking the time for adjustment to the diagnosis and for realistic planning and consideration of financial advice is important.

### If you have just been diagnosed you need to consider:

- U Whether there are any occupational health and safety issues with your current symptoms.
- U What typical symptoms may mean for your future employment, although each individual develops a different combination of the symptoms of Parkinson's.
- U Whether you are already stressed trying to hide symptoms, or whether they are unlikely to be noticed.
- U Whether disclosure would enable you to focus on what you need to do, not what you're trying to hide.
- U Whether part-time work would be possible in the future.
- U How early retirement may affect your finances.
- U Whether you need any current support from disability services or providers such as the National Disability Insurance Scheme (which has a cut-off age of 65).
- U Whether you feel you need a support person when disclosing your condition to your employer.

Employers' health and safety checks, health reviews, and annual employee performance reviews are designed to identify any performance or safety issues with any staff member – whether or not they have disclosed any particular condition.

## Employment discrimination

Federal, State and Territory legislation has specific rulings to help both employee and employer where disability affects employment. Ask for personal advice from the relevant authority. Workers' compensation legislation may apply in some circumstances.

### Other sources of information are:

- U Work and Superannuation – Fair Work Australia Ombudsman: <https://www.fairwork.gov.au/>
- U Disability Employment Services: <https://www.jobaccess.gov.au/>
- U Fight Parkinson's – Parkinson's and working: <https://www.fightparkinsons.org.au/parkinsons-and-you/working/>

Research suggests that people living with Parkinson's are likely to give up employment within ten years of diagnosis. If you decide to reduce your hours or leave your job you may find you are less stressed than if you struggled to keep up with work – provided you are able to manage financially.

**For more information call the Parkinson's NSW HealthLine on 1800 644 189.**

## Online employment services

These government-funded services may help you find and maintain employment. If you are already employed and have been working for longer than 13 weeks, you may be eligible for specific assistance to help you keep your current employment.

Contact the Online Employment Service directly through the Workforce Australia web site: <https://www.workforceaustralia.gov.au/online-employment-services>