

Parkinson's Disease

Facts about Parkinsons and motor system disorders



*Don't Feel Guilty ∞
You Can't Do It All!*

What is Parkinson's Disease?

Parkinson's disease is one of a larger group of neurological conditions called motor system disorders. It is a progressive, degenerative disorder of the nervous system. Symptoms vary from tremor and involuntary movement to rigidity and immobility. As the disease progresses, the patient's motor control diminishes, impairing speech, swallowing, and increasing the risk of injuries from falling.

Symptoms

In the normal brain, some nerve cells produce the chemical dopamine, which transmits signals within the brain to produce smooth movement of muscles. In Parkinson's patients, 80 percent or more of these dopamine-producing cells are damaged, dead, or otherwise degenerated. This causes the nerve cells to fire wildly, leaving patients unable to control their movements. Symptoms usually show up in one or more of four ways:

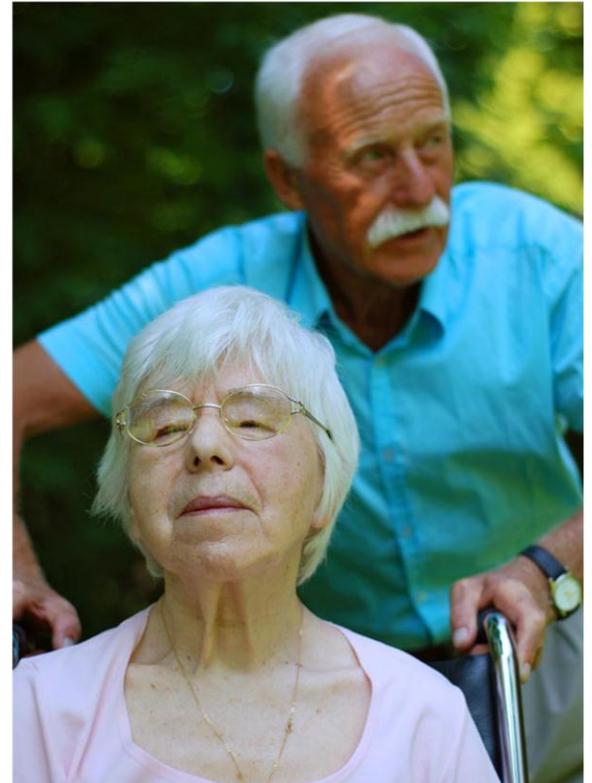
- Tremor, or trembling in hands, arms, legs, jaw, and face
- Rigidity, or stiffness of limbs and trunk
- Bradykinesia, or slowness of movement
- Postural instability or impaired balance and coordination.

Though full-blown Parkinson's can be crippling or disabling, experts say early symptoms of the disease may be so subtle and gradual that patients sometimes ignore them or attribute them to the effects of aging. At first, patients may feel overly tired, "down in the dumps," or a little shaky. Their speech may become soft and they may become irritable for no reason. Movements may be stiff, unsteady, or unusually slow.

Caring For Parkinson's Patients

Education and training of the caretaker is critical in providing safe care while maintaining the dignity of the client. Although there is no cure for Parkinson's disease, there are several measures that can be taken to improve a patient's quality of life.

Caretakers can contribute to patient lifestyle changes, and assist in physical and speech therapies. As the disease progresses, swallowing can become impaired, requiring a gastrostomy tube for food and medication intake.



Need more information?

National Parkinson Foundation
800-327-4545
www.parkinson.org

American Parkinson Disease Association
800-223-2732
www.apdaparkinson.org

NINDS Parkinson's Disease Information Page
www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/parkinsons_disease/parkinsons_disease

Michael J. Fox Foundation
For Parkinson's Research
www.michaeljfox.org