

Depression, Anxiety and Apathy

Mood and Mental Health in Parkinson's

Mood changes, including depression and anxiety, are common in Parkinson's. These can result from changes in Dopamine and other substances or neurotransmitters in the brain. The emotional impact of receiving a diagnosis, or the challenges of living with symptoms can also affect mood. Parkinson's is a complex and individual condition—there's no "right" way to feel as you navigate your journey.

Emotional Responses to Parkinson's

Receiving a Parkinson's diagnosis and living with its symptoms can evoke a range of emotions. It's normal to feel grief, anger, frustration, denial, uncertainty, or even relief. You might ask, "Why me?" or worry about the future. These feelings may fluctuate over time and won't necessarily follow a predictable pattern.

Understanding your emotional responses can help you move towards living positively with Parkinson's.

Mood and Motivation

While motor symptoms of Parkinson's are visible, non-motor symptoms such as mood changes, anxiety, and apathy can be less obvious but equally significant. These often precede a diagnosis and may greatly affect your daily life.

It's crucial to address these changes with your health team, as they may improve with Parkinson's medications, counselling, or other treatments.

Depression and Anxiety

Research shows that up to 50% of people with Parkinson's experience depression, and about 40% experience anxiety. While feeling low occasionally is normal, clinical depression is more persistent and affects daily life. If you notice persistent feelings of sadness, moodiness, irritability, or a lack of interest in activities that once brought joy, this may indicate clinical depression. Anxiety, meanwhile, can manifest as uncontrollable worry, phobias, panic attacks, or physical symptoms like a racing heart or hot flashes.

Both conditions may fluctuate with medication cycles, with mood dips often occurring as medication wears off. Treatments are available, and it's important to seek help if these symptoms persist.

Apathy

Apathy, or a lack of motivation, enthusiasm, and emotion, is another common symptom of Parkinson's. Unlike depression, apathy is not linked to sadness but stems from changes in brain chemistry. This symptom can be frustrating for you and for your carers and family members supporting you. Setting goals, scheduling enjoyable activities, and incorporating regular exercise can help combat apathy.

Managing Your Mood and Mental Wellbeing

Medical Support

If you're experiencing depression, anxiety, or apathy, a medical review is a good starting point. Your treating doctor can assess your mood, adjust

your medications, and refer you to a counsellor, psychologist, or psychiatrist.

Antidepressants may be helpful but should be discussed with your treating doctor to understand potential side effects. Parkinson's medications can also improve mood symptoms, and timing your doses effectively may help stabilise mood fluctuations.

Psychological Support

Counselling or psychological therapies can be highly effective. You may be able to access subsidised sessions through a Mental Health Treatment Plan via Medicare or through private health insurance. These therapies provide tools to manage emotions and develop resilience.

Lifestyle Strategies

Incorporating various lifestyle strategies can also support your mental wellbeing.

- **Stay connected:** Maintain social ties and engage in activities that bring you joy.
- **Exercise regularly:** Aim for a mix of aerobic, strength, and balance exercises three to four times a week for 45 minutes. A physiotherapist or an Exercise Physiologist can assist you in developing an exercise routine.
- **Eat well:** While there's no specific Parkinson's diet, a balanced diet supports gut health and overall energy levels, positively affecting mood. Eating well can also assist in managing symptoms such as constipation which can affect medication absorption and mood.
- **Understand and listen:** Depression is a common symptom of Parkinson's; it is not a sign of weakness. Those around you may notice mood changes and there is value in listening to them.
- **Practice mindfulness:** Meditation, progressive muscle relaxation, or guided breathing can help calm the mind and reduce stress.

Self-Care Tips for Daily Living

- **Pace yourself:** Avoid overloading your schedule. Allow for breaks and balance activities with rest.
- **Stay positive:** Focus on what makes you happy and maintain a hopeful outlook.
- **Plan:** Arrange outings and activities for when you feel your best and medications are most effective.
- **Learn about Parkinson's:** Understanding your condition and treatments can empower you and help you manage symptoms.

Peer Support and Connection

Connecting with others who understand your experience can provide comfort and practical advice. Fight Parkinson's Peer Support Groups cater to people with Parkinson's, their families, and carers. Groups are available for specific interests or needs, such as Young Onset or Atypical Parkinson's. Other non-Parkinson's-specific groups, like craft or book clubs, also offer opportunities for connection.

When joining a Parkinson's support group, remember that everyone's Parkinson's journey is unique. Symptoms and progression vary widely, so avoid direct comparisons.

Managing Fatigue

Fatigue can be a major challenge. Speak with your health team to explore medication adjustments or other solutions. Incorporating regular exercise, maintaining a consistent sleep schedule, and pacing your activities with breaks can help conserve energy and reduce fatigue.

With the right support and tools, you can manage your symptoms and continue to lead a fulfilling life.

Fight Parkinson's is a leading source of specialised health information and advice services. Through research, education, and support, we strive to improve the lives of people living with Parkinson's, PSP, MSA and CBS.

Any medical information provided is for general information purposes only. You should always talk to your treating doctor and qualified healthcare providers for personal medical and health-related instructions.

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