

Building your team – Multidisciplinary care

Who should be on your team?

The best care for a person living with Parkinson's is focused on an individual's personal and family needs, supported by a team of multidisciplinary healthcare professionals. The following practitioners can all positively contribute to the health and wellbeing of people living with Parkinson's.

Seeking help from a range of health professionals and building a team to support various treatments and strategies is recognised as best practice to live well with Parkinson's.

General Practitioner (GP)

A GP is usually the first medical professional you see for a health issue. GPs are not necessarily experts in Parkinson's however they will be able to assess any symptoms you are experiencing, provide a treatment option or refer you to a specialist.

If your GP suspects you have Parkinson's, they will refer you to a Neurologist. Your GP can also work with you to create a Chronic Disease Management Plan. This plan enables people living with a chronic condition (including Parkinson's) to receive five Medicare subsidised sessions per calendar year with an allied healthcare provider and 10 sessions with a Mental Health Professional.

Neurologist

A Neurologist is a specialist physician who diagnoses and treats neurological conditions (conditions of the brain, spinal cord and nerves). There are neurologists who specialise in movement disorders which includes Parkinson's.

A Specialist Neurologist will be familiar with the many different presentations of Parkinson's. They will be able to identify the best treatment options. You need to get a referral from a GP to see a neurologist. Neurologists with an interest in Parkinson's are available in both public and private health care services.

Physiotherapist

Physiotherapists use exercise and physical therapy to help keep people with Parkinson's mobile. They assess how Parkinson's affects movement and recommend exercises to improve strength, flexibility, improve balance, and prevent falls. They can also assist with managing pain.

Physiotherapists are the most suitable healthcare professionals to recommend and prescribe an appropriate walking or mobility aid, if required.

Occupational Therapist (OT)

OTs can help people with Parkinson's stay independent for longer. They help people to continue doing the work and leisure activities important in their lives. An OT can attend home and workplace visits and suggest easier ways to undertake tasks that have become difficult. They can suggest changes to make a home safer and recommend equipment and aids to help a person maintain their independence.

Speech Pathologist

Speech Pathologists can assist in maintaining and improving speech and communication. They help to maintain safe swallowing and develop strategies to manage saliva and oral secretions.

Speech Pathologists may recommend exercises to improve speech and voice volume or assist in prescribing aids to support effective communication.

Speech Pathologists can assess effective swallowing and recommend appropriate consistency of food and fluid which will be the easiest and safest to swallow.

Neuropsychologist

Parkinson's can affect how people feel, think and behave. A Neuropsychologist is a type of psychologist who specialises in understanding how the brain and behaviour are connected.

A Neuropsychologist's exam can provide a baseline to help determine disease progression, cognitive (thinking) and memory function. They can provide guidance and strategies for management.

Parkinson's Nurse

A Parkinson's Nurse has specialist experience, knowledge and skills. They provide advice and can recommend symptom management strategies. As Parkinson's progresses, they can offer guidance on managing medication and refer to other healthcare professionals for more specialist advice.

There are very few Parkinson's Nurses, however nurses working in chronic disease management programs such as Hospital Admission Risk Programs (HARP) or in General Practice surgeries may be able to assist with referrals to other suitable healthcare professionals.

Other Healthcare Professionals

Your GP can assist with referrals to a range of other healthcare professionals who can help in manage symptoms of Parkinson's such as.

- Social Workers /Psychologists - assist with counselling and supportive therapies. A Social Worker may be able to assist in accessing benefits through Services Australia/Centrelink
- Exercise Physiologist- may be able to help in developing a safe and personalised exercise routine.

There are many other health care professionals who can be involved in Parkinson's care as needs arise.

When you build a team to help manage the symptoms of Parkinson's, it is important to communicate your personal goals and concerns.

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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