

Symptoms of Parkinson's

Parkinson's is a complex condition with a range of motor and non-motor symptoms unique to each individual.

The underlying cause of Parkinson's symptoms relates to a decline in the production of a brain chemical called dopamine.

Most people will experience some early symptoms of Parkinson's several years before developing a motor or movement symptom. These are known as pre-motor or prodromal symptoms and may include:

- Anosmia
- Constipation
- Rapid Eye Movement Sleep disorder
- Depression
- Minor blood pressure fluctuations

The most common initial symptoms of Parkinson's include stiffening muscles, slowing movement and changing posture. Many people also experience tremors when resting.

Parkinson's is much more than these recognised symptoms. There are around 40 symptoms that can be experienced.

The symptoms that might present with Parkinson's are:

Bradykinesia and Rigidity

Slowness of movement (bradykinesia) and muscle stiffness (rigidity) are both typical motor symptoms of Parkinson's.

Impulsive and Compulsive Behaviours

Impulsive and compulsive behaviours are possible side effects of some Parkinson's medications. Only a small number of people experience these behaviours, but it can have a significant impact on the person affected and those around them.

Dementia and Cognitive Change

Cognition or cognitive function is a term used to describe the thought processes of your brain. Cognition includes judgement, reasoning, problem-solving and memory. In Parkinson's, thinking may slow or difficulties in carrying out complex tasks can be experienced. Some people may experience more significant cognitive changes or dementia.

A full list of symptoms

- Resting tremor - shaking which is more likely to occur when a limb is relaxed and resting
- Bradykinesia - slowness of movement
- Rigidity - stiffness and tension in the muscles
- Freezing – movement becomes frozen
- Hypomimia (Parkinson's mask) – loss of ability to make facial expressions
- Dystonia - painful muscle cramps
- Stooped posture (postural imbalance)
- Altered (shuffling) gait – reduced step size and group clearance
- Balance problems – increases likelihood of falls
- Anosmia – loss of sense of smell
- Reduced pain threshold
- Pain – nerve, musculoskeletal and radicular (sharp, shooting)
- Micrographia (small handwriting)
- Fatigue
- Urinary urgency
- Nocturia (increased urinating overnight)
- Constipation
- Diminished or reduced libido in men and women
- Blood pressure fluctuations causing dizziness
- Excessive sweating
- Slurred speech
- Quiet voice
- Dysphagia – swallowing difficulties
- Dry mouth – drug side effect
- Drooling – due to thicker saliva
- Sleep difficulties
- REM sleep disorder (acting out dreams)
- Restless legs
- Apathy
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Cognitive changes - difficulty with multi-tasking or planning
- Dementia
- Hallucinations
- Delusions and psychosis
- Impulsive/compulsive behaviour (medication side effect)
- Skin changes – increased production of oil
- Difficulties focussing may cause blurred or double vision
- Eyelid apraxia (involuntary closure of eyelids) in advanced Parkinson's
- Weight loss in advanced Parkinson's

Not everyone living with Parkinson's will experience each of these symptoms, as Parkinson's affects everyone differently. Parkinson's is a progressive condition, so symptoms change over time.

If you are experiencing symptoms, it is important to discuss these with your GP or Neurologist to establish the best symptom management plan.

Fight Parkinson's Health Team can also help you to navigate symptoms as they arise. Contact 1800 644 189, info@fightparkinsons.org.au or visit www.fightparkinsons.org.au.

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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