

# information

## STAYING POSITIVE – PEER GROUPS

Living with Parkinson's or caring for someone with Parkinson's is full of challenges, but you don't have to feel alone. Parkinson's Victoria currently operates more than 50 peer groups throughout metropolitan and rural Victoria,

A peer group is an informal gathering of people who share similar experiences, situations or problems. Parkinson's Peer Groups offer members a chance to meet and talk with others while offering each other emotional and practical support. Besides helping you realise you are not alone, a peer group gives you a chance to share your feelings and hear the experiences of others.

Meetings are informal and friendly, and new members are always welcome. Parkinson's peer groups are ideal for people living with Parkinson's, their carers, friends and family members.

Peer groups encourage the growth of knowledge. By knowing more about Parkinson's through the experience of others, and through professional resources, you will discover new ways of dealing with your own symptoms and challenges.

Peer groups can help you renew your sense of hope in dealing with changes to your lifestyle, and offer you the chance to make new friends.

### What to expect

Peer Group meetings typically involve:

- Group discussions and sharing experiences, information, practical tips and advice on living with Parkinson's
- Visits from the Parkinson's Victoria Health Team
- Social activities and day excursions
- Guest speakers are also invited to meetings to discuss topical and relevant subjects. These may include occupational therapists, social workers and doctors.
- Parkinson's Peer Groups also offer a range of support and information resources which members can access.

Parkinson's Victoria Peer Groups use a self-help model and are not therapy groups. (If you are seeking a counselling therapy group, please contact Parkinson's Victoria for a referral). Our peer groups are run by volunteers who may also be a health professional from your local area, a person living with Parkinson's or a carer.

Peer Groups appeal to a range of people for a variety of reasons. Some members like to be very active and involved in the planning of meetings and activities, other members prefer to simply enjoy the company.

Peer Groups vary in their makeup, from the number of members, to the age and interests of the individuals.

When you join a Peer Group meeting, you may meet people who have had Parkinson's a lot longer than you. You'll definitely meet people who have had different experiences to yours. Don't be afraid. No two people with Parkinson's are ever the same and it's important to remember that everyone's journey is unique.

To find out where your nearest Parkinson's Victoria Peer Group is, contact Parkinson's Victoria.

*Note: While members may discuss their experiences of Parkinson's during meetings, it is important to remember that everyone has different symptoms and will respond differently to treatments. Professional advice should be sought before altering any treatment.*

For further information contact  
Freecall 1800 644 189  
[www.parkinsonsvic.org.au](http://www.parkinsonsvic.org.au)

IN THIS TOGETHER  
**parkinson's**  
VICTORIA

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Many employers know very little about Parkinson's and will be happy to help if you inform them of your situation and the condition.

However, if your employer is unwilling to help, you might have a legal claim. Under anti-discrimination laws or workplace relations laws, your employer may be forced to alter your working conditions or pay you compensation.

## Do I Have To Tell My Employer?

Generally, you don't have to tell your employer about your Parkinson's unless it's an Occupational Health and Safety risk (OH & S).

Also, your employer can't force you to see their doctor or sign authorities to obtain reports from your doctors. There are some exceptions such as for Workers Compensation claims.

However, in many cases telling your employer would be a positive move. It may help explain any problems you are having performing your work and may result in changes to your work which will mean you can continue to work productively.

It's important to assess what you think the reaction of your employer will be and perhaps enlist the help of your doctor, Union or a Parkinson's support group.

## Physical Changes

Parkinson's can affect mobility, posture and facial expression and these physical changes may impact on relationships and intimacy. These changes can result in self esteem issues for the person living with Parkinson's and may also have implications for the partner.

## Role Changes

A diagnosis of Parkinson's will affect both the person living with Parkinson's and their partner. As the condition progresses there may be a shift in role from partner to carer and at times these roles may overlap. This may result in grief, confusion and frustration.

Health professionals may add to this role confusion by labeling partners as 'carers' before the role has changed or before the couple have acknowledged the change.

Ideally, the transition from partner to carer is a natural progression eased by the love and companionship enjoyed in a long-term relationship. If required, counselling will assist in this transition.

## Depression

Many people living with Parkinson's will experience depression at some time. In some cases depression may precede the diagnosis. Depression can impact greatly on relationships.

In Parkinson's there is often an associated anxiety, apathy and lack of motivation. It is recommended that any change in mood be discussed with the treating specialist who will advise on an appropriate choice of antidepressant or non-medication intervention.

Some Parkinson's medications may interact with some forms of antidepressants therefore specialist medical management is essential.