

MANAGING PARKINSON'S DURING THE FESTIVE SEASON

The holiday season is classically a time for catching up with friends, visiting family, shopping, decorating, gift wrapping, cooking, and celebrating. Though it is typically a fun and happy period, it can also be very demanding and sometimes stressful. This fact sheet looks at the aspects of Parkinson's that can make things harder during the Festive Season, and some of the ways to manage them.

Be practical

Christmas can be a frantic time, with lots of things going on at once. Parkinson's can make multi-tasking – or doing more than one thing at a time – difficult. This might include trying to talk while unwrapping presents, keeping track of multiple conversations while eating, or listening to guests in a noisy environment.

Try focussing on doing one thing at a time, and reducing distractions as much as possible, for example, turn down the Christmas carols or find a quiet corner to have your conversation.

- Be aware that there may be some things you can no longer do easily.
- Ensure you get plenty of rest and sleep during the holiday season.
- Where possible, plan your social activities and travel for your "on" times – when your medication is at its best.

Family and friends

Depression, fatigue, reduced facial expression, and trouble speaking clearly can make social situations difficult, even with family.

Family or friends who may not have seen you for some time, perhaps since last Christmas, may be unprepared for how Parkinson's has progressed for you.

Be aware that it may be difficult for your loved ones to see this and they may not know how to respond. Try not to take their response personally. Reinforce to family and friends that you are still the same person, and make sure you keep communication channels open. Let them know if there is anything they can do to assist you – such as shopping, hanging decorations, or wrapping presents on your behalf.

As many as 70 percent of people with Parkinson's will experience depression or anxiety as part of their illness. These feelings may worsen during the holiday season, when there is a focus on being "merry". Talk to your doctor if you are feeling low or anxious for a period of more than two weeks. An adjustment to Parkinson's medication may help to alleviate symptoms of depression or anxiety.

Ensure you make the most of the supports around you: social support such as friends and family, as well as more formal support such as counsellors and other help services.

Contact *Beyondblue* on 1300 22 4636 for information on depression, anxiety and related disorders, available treatments and referrals to relevant services; or *Lifeline* on 13 11 14 for crisis support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

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Eat, drink and be merry

For most people, Christmas is a time when we eat too much, drink too much and don't exercise as much as we should!

Typically, much of the food consumed during the festive season is high in fat and protein. For people living with Parkinson's who are taking Parkinson's medications, it is important to remember that different types of food can impact on the effectiveness of medication. This may mean that certain symptoms persist even though the medication has been taken. For example, Dopamine-based medication (such as Sinemet™, Madopar™, Kinson™ and Stalevo™) taken close to a meal high in fat or protein may cause the medication to have a reduced effect.

Medications: Get it on time!

With so many things to do and places to be at this time of year, it can be a challenge to remember to take medications.

It is essential that Parkinson's medications are taken on time, every time to help manage symptoms and to improve quality of life and mobility. This is even more important at times such as Christmas when there is more activity and pressure than usual. In order to assist you to get your medication on time, you may need to adjust the timing of your travel, activities, or meals; make use of a device such as a medication timer (a pill box with built in alarms); or set reminders on your mobile phone.

Summer heat and Parkinson's

While people living with Parkinson's are not significantly affected by extremes of heat or cold, unlike some other neurological conditions, many people do report that their symptoms worsen a little on very hot or cold days. During the summer months, we all tend to perspire more as the temperature increases and with persistent heat it is easy to become dehydrated. Dehydration will also worsen constipation, increase urinary concentration (heightening risk of urinary tract infection), cause dry skin (increasing skin irritation) and contribute to headaches.

To avoid this, you may need to increase your fluid intake, particularly water. If you find increasing your fluids also increases your trips to the toilet, consider drinking more fluid when you take your medication so that these trips occur when you're "on."

Keeping cool and out of the sun will also help reduce dehydration.

Note: People living with Parkinson's who hold a Pensioner Concession Card, Health Care Card or DVA Gold Card are eligible for the summer Medical Cooling Concession. This entitles card holders to an additional 17.5% discount off electricity costs between 1st November and 30th April. For more information contact Parkinson's Victoria, the Victorian Concessions Information Line (1800 658 521) or your energy provider.

For further information contact
Freecall 1800 644 189
www.parkinsonsvic.org.au

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Travelling

Having Parkinson's does not have to stop you from having holidays, however if you are taking a summer holiday away from home, it's best to plan ahead.

Discuss your holiday plans with your GP or Neurologist, who can provide you with a letter explaining your Parkinson's and its treatment, including a list of the medications you take and when you take them. This can prove invaluable in the event that you need medical attention while away.

If you are travelling overseas or to a remote destination, it may be difficult to find a pharmacy, so always travel with a good supply of medication. Australian prescriptions cannot be filled overseas. Most Parkinson's medications are available overseas, however you will need a local prescription, following a visit to a local doctor.

It is also important to note that any discounts you may receive in Australia for your Parkinson's medications will not be available overseas and you will most likely have to pay full price.

Always keep your medications with you while in transit - never check your medication with your stowed luggage. It's also a good idea to keep copies of your prescriptions with you just in case your bags are lost or delayed.

The excitement of arriving at your destination, disrupted sleep and travel delays can cause earlier "wearing off" than normal. Be prepared to take an extra dose when you arrive to help manage symptoms that may worsen or occur earlier than expected since your last dose as a result of travel delays, disrupted sleep etc.

How you manage long haul travel will depend on the symptoms you experience. Contact Parkinson's Victoria or your Neurologist to discuss planning your journey.

Be sun sensible

Medications containing Dopamine (such as Sinemet™, Madopar™, Kinson™ and Stalevo™) are known to activate malignant melanoma, which is a serious skin cancer. Exposure to the sun also increases the risk of developing this cancer.

As well as adopting some 'sun safe' practices, such as staying out of direct sunlight, and wearing a hat and sunscreen, monitor any skin lesions and consider an annual skin check with your local doctor.

Parkinson's Victoria

For more information about managing Parkinson's this festive season, or if you have any questions in relation to Parkinson's, please contact Parkinson's Victoria on 1800 644 189.

The Parkinson's Victoria office will remain open Monday to Friday throughout the festive season, excluding public holidays.

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