

Communicating with people living with Parkinson's

Communication is a two-way experience that goes beyond expressing basic wants and needs.

It allows us to build connections with those around us.

If you are communicating with a person living with Parkinson's, having patience and understanding can make for a better experience for everyone.

We all play a role in successful communication.

Common communication challenges

Changes in communication abilities can occur in people living with Parkinson's, these changes can create challenges. Understanding these changes can help you be a better communicator and ensure that no one is left out of the conversation.

Changes in communication can also impact access to care or the ability to self-advocate.

These challenges could include:

- Difficulty expressing feelings such as hunger, pain, or anxiety
- Fluctuating ability to communicate throughout the day as medications wear off
- Social isolation
- Cognitive changes
- Unfamiliar care staff

Tips for supporting communication

Below are some tips you can share with your family, friends, and carers so that they can better communicate with you.

Support understanding

- Be patient
- Face the person you're speaking with
- Check you have the person's attention before you begin
- Remind the speaker of their strategies
- Use simple language where appropriate
- Use facial expression and gestures like pointing
- Consider visual aids where helpful, photos of important people and interests can be a source of conversation. A speech pathologist can help with creating visual aids to support specific conversations or care tasks
- Objects can be used to support the understanding of verbal questions, use real items to demonstrate options such as a tea bag or coffee pot

Support expression

- Allow extra time for responses
- Be careful not to speak across people instead of to them
- Take care not to misinterpret reduced facial expressions as disinterest
- Be honest when you haven't understood something; try asking for clarification on the specific thing you haven't understood, not the whole sentence
- Openly discuss communication challenges
- Double check important messages
- When someone can't think of a word, use targeted questions or prompts to help them find the right one



Support positive communication

- Set aside time for meaningful social conversations that go beyond providing care
- Continue to provide choices and control over daily life
- Encourage and support participation in social activities
- Explain what is going to happen next when providing care
- If working with carers, ask they are trained in Parkinson's-specific communication strategies; Fight Parkinson's can assist in providing consultation and training.

The Fight Parkinson's multi-disciplinary Health Team includes a speech pathologist.

Speak with us to explore the benefits of adding a speech pathologist to your care team. Call the Fight Parkinson's Free Health Line Service at 1800 644 189.