

Communication and Parkinson's

Finding your voice

The ability to communicate goes beyond expressing basic wants and needs. It allows us to build and maintain connections, express our personalities, and share how we feel.

For people living with Parkinson's, changes in speech and communication can be challenging. It is important to be aware of any changes and put into place strategies to minimise their impact.

You do not need to wait until you notice communication changes to meet with a speech pathologist. They can be beneficial at any stage.

How Parkinson's affects communication

Communication is multifaceted and includes speaking, writing, and body language. People living with Parkinson's may experience changes to how they speak, the words they use, how their face and voice show emotion, and their handwriting.

While not everyone with Parkinson's will experience communication difficulties, many do. Changes you may notice include:

- Quiet or hoarse voice (dysphonia)
- Slurred speech (dysarthria)
- Changes to rate of speech
- Monotone voice (reduced intonation)
- Difficulty in expressing thoughts and ideas
- Words getting stuck on the 'tip-of-your-tongue' (word finding difficulties)
- Needing more time to process information
- Difficulty paying attention
- Reduced facial expressions (hypomimia)

- Changes in body language
- Small, spidery handwriting (micrographia)
- Increased effort and fatigue when communicating

The role of a speech pathologist

Despite their name, speech pathologists can help with all forms of communication, including facial expressions, body language, speech and fluency. They can also assist with swallowing problems and saliva control. A speech pathologist can work with you to make communication easier. Their work can be both reactive and proactive, helping you to maintain your communication skill.

If those around you are asking you to repeat yourself or you have noticed any changes to your communication you may want to consider contacting a speech pathologist.

Speech therapy can focus on:

- Increasing speech volume
- Improving articulation and tone
- Enhancing breath control for speech
- Supporting non-verbal communication
- Helping you with swallowing problems
- Suggesting communication aids if talking has become very difficult for you

Helpful tips for you

- Stay relaxed and focus on speaking clearly
- Speak louder and slower, imagining you are addressing a larger audience
- Maintain good posture and take a deep breath before speaking
- Take regular deep breaths during conversations to maintain a loud voice
- Emphasise key words
- Use gestures such as nodding

- Reduce background noise, consider turning off the TV or radio before having a conversation. If outside of your home, consider looking for quiet venues
- When you can't think of a specific word, describe it instead
- Seek advice from a speech pathologist for tailored strategies

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 931 031.

Speech and communication skills require ongoing practice

- Stay socially active - join a social or singing group, Fight Parkinson's runs free Online Singing sessions fortnightly
- Maintain existing social activities and be creative to keep doing the things you enjoy, for example if evening fatigue is hard, meet for brunch instead of dinner
- Practice techniques learned in speech therapy
- Discuss new or changing challenges with your loved ones and health team
- Explore technology such as speech therapy apps or communication devices with support from your speech pathologist



Inform yourself, inform your team

- Parkinson's affects everyone differently, sharing your experiences with your health team helps them provide the best support.
- Speaking openly with your speech pathologist about changes in your communication will put them in the best position to give the advice that is most helpful for you. Consider sharing feedback from your friends and family about your communication as well as any changes you have noticed yourself.
- It's important to keep practicing your new strategies at home and to remember that some days will feel easier than others. On the harder days, it is key those around you know how to support you in making sure you're not left out of the conversation.
- As you find communication strategies that work for you don't be afraid to tell other members of your health team how they can best communicate with you.

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 medial 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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