



Parkinson's Disease

Parkinson's Disease fact sheet for Adults Social Care and Health

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EAST RIDING
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Parkinson's Disease

...for Adults Social Care and Health

Overview:	This fact sheet will explain what Parkinson's disease is, discuss its causes and symptoms, and explore the treatment options and support services available to individuals living with the condition.
Content:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Introduction to Parkinson's disease2. Causes3. Symptoms4. Treatment and Support5. Caring for someone with Parkinson's disease

I Introduction

Parkinson's disease is a condition in which parts of the brain become progressively damaged over many years. As the condition advances, symptoms can worsen, and everyday activities may become increasingly difficult to manage without support.

Most people with Parkinson's begin to develop symptoms after the age of 50, although some individuals experience symptoms earlier, sometimes before the age of 40.

Men are slightly more likely to develop Parkinson's disease than women.

2 Causes

Parkinson's disease occurs when nerve cells in a part of the brain called the substantia nigra become damaged and die. These cells normally produce dopamine, a chemical that plays an essential role in coordinating and controlling movement. When dopamine levels fall, the brain is less able to regulate movement properly, leading to many of the symptoms associated with Parkinson's disease.

The reason these nerve cells are lost is not fully understood. However, most experts believe it is likely caused by a combination of genetic factors and environmental influences.

3 Symptoms

The symptoms of Parkinson's disease usually develop gradually and are mild at first. There are many possible symptoms, and the order in which they appear, as well as their severity, can vary widely between individuals. It is also unlikely that someone will experience all of the symptoms associated with the condition.

The three primary symptoms of Parkinson's disease are:

- Involuntary shaking of parts of the body (tremor)
- Slowness of movement (bradykinesia)
- Stiff or inflexible muscles

Other possible symptoms

People with Parkinson's may also experience a range of other physical and psychological symptoms, such as:

- Depression and anxiety
- Balance problems, which can increase the risk of falls
- Reduced sense of smell (anosmia)
- Sleep problems (insomnia)
- Memory difficulties
- Nerve pain
- Urinary incontinence problems

4 Treatment and Support

Seeing a GP

A GP should be consulted if someone develops symptoms that may indicate Parkinson's disease. The doctor will ask about symptoms and medical history and may decide to refer the person to a specialist for further assessment and tests.

Treatment Options

Although there is currently no cure for Parkinson's disease, a range of treatments can help manage the main symptoms and maintain quality of life for as long as possible. These may include:

- Supportive therapies, such as physiotherapy and occupational therapy
- Medication
- Brain surgery, in certain cases
- A home-monitoring device that tracks symptoms

Some people may not require treatment in the early stages, as symptoms can be mild. Regular follow-up appointments with a specialist are usually recommended to monitor how the condition progresses.

Supportive Therapies

Several therapies can help make living with the condition easier and assist with day-to-day symptom management:

- Physiotherapy to help reduce muscle stiffness and improve movement
- Occupational therapy to develop practical strategies for daily activities
- Speech and language therapy to support communication and swallowing
- Dietary advice from a dietitian or healthcare professional
- Medication to manage tremor and movement difficulties

- Deep brain stimulation, which involves implanting a pulse generator to help control symptoms

Treatment for Additional Symptoms

Alongside movement difficulties, some people experience other symptoms that may require separate treatment. These can include:

- Depression and anxiety
- Erectile dysfunction
- Excessive sweating (hyperhidrosis)
- Excessive drooling
- Dementia

Staying Healthy

There are also steps individuals can take to help maintain physical and mental wellbeing. Eating a balanced diet ensures the body gets the nutrients it needs, while regular exercise can help reduce muscle stiffness, improve mood, and relieve stress. It is also important to keep up with recommended vaccinations, such as the flu vaccine, to help protect against infections and maintain overall health.

5 Caring for Someone with Parkinson's Disease

Caring for someone with Parkinson's disease requires an understanding of the symptoms they may experience and the types of treatment and support available. While many symptoms can be managed effectively, they should be monitored closely and addressed through a personalised approach.

A person's care and support plan and their risk assessment should clearly outline how Parkinson's disease affects them individually. This includes the symptoms they experience, the support required, any risks identified, and the personal goals they wish to work towards. Key areas to consider and what support should be included are:

Mobility, Balance and Involuntary Movements

Parkinson's disease often affects movement, including tremors, slow movement, and balance difficulties.

- Close monitoring of mobility changes and any difficulties with daily tasks.
- Referrals to Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy for assessment, physical therapy, and specialist equipment.
- Clear documentation in the care plan if there is a risk of falls.
- Referral to the Falls Team where appropriate, following the Post-Falls Protocol.
- Referrals to Speech and Language Therapy for support at mealtimes, including mealtime equipment to aid independence when struggling with tremors or movement e.g. spouted beakers, easy grip cutlery and dignity plates.

Sleep Difficulties and Incontinence

Both sleep problems and bladder or bowel changes are common in Parkinson's.

- Maintaining the person's dignity at all times.

- Discussing available support options, such as referral to the Bowel and Bladder Team for assessment and continence aids if needed.
- Being responsive to the person's routines and individual sleep needs, as disturbed sleep can impact mood and overall wellbeing.
- Seeking GP advice where appropriate, which may include a review of medication.

Memory, Cognition and Emotional Wellbeing

Memory changes, anxiety, and depression can occur as part of the condition.

- Providing access to meaningful activities that promote both physical and mental health.
- Encouraging social engagement and cognitive stimulation.
- Supporting healthy eating to ensure adequate nutrients that support muscle and neurological health.
- Monitoring changes in mood and referring to the GP or mental health teams if needed.

Useful Support Tools

GP or Parkinson's disease specialist nurse

Counsellor or psychologist – accessed through GP referral

Parkinson's UK – <https://www.parkinsons.org.uk/>

Parkinson's UK Helpline – 0808 800 0303 / hello@parkinsons.org.uk

Financial support advice – <https://www.moneyhelper.org.uk/en>

Benefits for carers – <https://www.nhs.uk/social-care-and-support/support-and-benefits-for-carers/benefits-for-carers/>

Benefit checker – <https://www.gov.uk/browse/benefits>

Parkinson's UK Hull and East Yorkshire Support Groups – <https://localsupport.parkinsons.org.uk/>

Gym membership trial programmes – 10-week trial (via GP referral)

NHS guidance on Parkinson's disease – <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/parkinsons-disease/>