



Parkinson's disease

Parkinson's disease (PD) affects the nervous system. It affects more men than women and most often those over the age of 50. The average age of onset is about 70 years.



SIGNS & SYMPTOMS



Early symptoms can be subtle. They occur gradually and include:

- Feeling a little shaky, especially in the hands. A person's handwriting can look spidery and smaller.
- Being tired. Speaking too softly.
- Losing track of a word or thought
- Sudden movements during sleep
- Having no facial expression
- Feeling irritable or depressed for no known reason

Four Main Symptoms

- Tremor. This may start in the hand while at rest, but can start in the head or leg. Tremor is not always present.
- Stiffness of the limbs and trunk.
- Slow movement. Less natural movement. The person may not be able to wash or dress quickly or easily.
- Loss of balance and coordination. This can lead to a stooped posture, a shuffling gait, and falls.

Other Symptoms

- Problems with chewing and swallowing.
- Mild cognitive impairment, such as feeling distracted or disorganized.
- Depression. Anxiety. Apathy.
- Speech changes. The person may speak too softly or in a monotone. The person may slur or repeat words, or speak too fast.
- Bladder or bowel problems, such as constipation.
- Skin that is too oily or dry.
- Restless sleep. Being drowsy during the day.
- Dementia (in advanced stages)



CAUSES

The exact cause is not known. What is known, though, is that certain cells in the lower part of the brain can't produce dopamine. Nerves need this to coordinate body movement.

{Note: Some medicines can bring on symptoms like ones of Parkinson's disease. Examples are anti-psychotic and anti-nausea drugs.}

Risk Factors

- Family history of the disease
- Aging. For some, the neurons that produce dopamine wear away with aging.
- Rarely, repeated trauma to the head. This can happen to boxers. Muhammad Ali has this condition.
- Damage to nerve cells through a chemical process called oxidation
- Toxins in the environment

TREATMENT

Parkinson's disease is not yet curable. Symptoms can be relieved or controlled.

Treatment includes:

- Medicines, such as levodopa, selegiline, and apomorphine.
- Physical therapy. This can help a person with PD maintain movement and balance.
- Speech therapy to help the person with PD maintain effective communication skills and assist with swallowing problems
- Direct electrical brain stimulation.
- Neurosurgery
- Therapeutic movement, including tai chi and yoga

TRIAGE QUESTIONS



Are one or more signs and symptoms of Parkinson's disease present?

NO

YES

SEE DOCTOR



Does a person with Parkinson's disease have either of these problems?

- Bothersome side effects from medicines
- New, unexpected symptoms occur during treatment

NO

YES

SEE DOCTOR



USE SELF-CARE



SELF-CARE / PREVENTION

- Follow your treatment plan.
- Plan and maintain safety in the home. Replace razor blades with electric shavers. Use nonskid rugs and handrails to prevent falls, etc.
- Make tasks easy to do. Wear loafers, not tie shoes. Wear clothes that can be pulled on. Use items with snaps or Velcro closures instead of buttons.
- Prevent constipation.
- Stay as active as you can. Do the activities and exercises advised by your doctor and/or physical therapist.
- Take warm baths. Get massages to help with rigid muscles.
- Eat healthy foods. If you take levodopa, limit the protein in your diet, as advised by your doctor. A high protein diet can lessen the effects of levodopa.