



Caring for Someone with Parkinson's Disease

Parkinson's disease is a progressive disorder that affects the nervous system. Signs and symptoms may include tremors, slowed movements, rigid muscles, impaired posture and balance, loss of unconscious movements such as blinking and smiling, speech changes and/or it may become hard to write. Simple, routine tasks can become more challenging as

Relocate frequently used items. This would apply to the kitchen, bedroom and bathroom.

Label drawers and cabinets. Make it easier to identify the contents within.

Simplify hygiene tasks. This could include electric toothbrushes and razors.

Substitute Velcro closures. Help to make it easier to close shirt cuffs, waistbands and shoes.

Make mealtime easier. There are a variety of assistive devices such as covered cups, large-handled utensils and plate guards.

Physical and Occupational Therapy. Therapists can recommend a plan tailored to your loved one's needs and concerns.

Cueing strategies. Parkinson's disease impacts the ability to perform movements that are usually done without conscious thought, such as standing and walking. Simple cues can help remind your loved one to stop and think about their movements.

"Stand tall" if posture becomes too flexed

"Big steps" to decrease shuffling when walking

"March" when turning to keep their knees high

Help with "freezing". Many people with Parkinson's disease experience "freezing" episodes, as if their feet are stuck in place.

Stop all movement and take a deep breath

Make sure weight is even on both feet

Visualize stepping over or kicking an object

Shift weight to the side and step with the unweighted foot

March in place before stepping

Help with hallucinations. Hallucinations can occur with those diagnosed with Parkinson's. Hallucination means that someone hears or feels something that is not physically present. It is not a dream, it occurs when the person is awake.

Acknowledge your loved one's experience.

Try not to argue with your loved one about their experience.

Be sure to have your loved one's physician check their medical regimen for any changes needed in their care plan.

Medications on time, every time. Pills on time is a crucial concept in Parkinson's management. Pills are scheduled at a particular time of day to minimize symptoms as much as possible.

- Keep an updated list of medications handy at all times.
- Set up medications in a weekly pill box with a secure lid.
- Store all medication bottles and pill boxes in a secure place.
- Set a reminder for pill times.
- Remember to take your loved one's pills with you if you will be away from the home during the scheduled dosage time.
- Always check with your loved one's physician before adding any new over the counter medications to their regimen.

Communication tips. Many will experience a soft voice that is hard to hear. There can be a loss of automatic facial expression that can be misinterpreted as boredom, anger or sadness.

- Try to communicate one on one or in a small group setting
- Reduce or remove distractions
- Be close to each other when you talk
- Encourage your loved one to take a deep breath before beginning
- Give your loved one time to respond

Help them cope with tiredness and fatigue. Many will report a loss of energy and chronic fatigue, which may be disruptive to planned activities and schedules.

- Adjust your schedule. Schedule fewer activities during the day and/or break up tasks and errands into shorter time periods.
- Prioritize rest. Schedule brief rest periods or naps to restore their energy during the day.

Keeping your loved one as safe as possible.

Driving. Loss of flexibility in the neck and trunk, reduced reaction time and changes in ability to multi-task may affect your loved one's driving safety. Though it may be difficult to broach this topic, it is important to be realistic and seek medical advice and input if you notice changes.

Use of power tools. Tremors combined with balance and coordination changes can impact safe use of power tools. Slowed reaction time can also add to safety concerns.

Kitchen appliances. A person with Parkinson's may begin to have difficulty managing cooking which is often a multi-step process. Balance changes can make opening a refrigerator and oven doors difficult, and falls can occur when attempting to reach high shelves or carry objects from counter to table.