Managing Parkinson’s Disease

Parkinson’s disease is a lifelong brain disorder that slowly worsens over time. Since managing this disease can be overwhelming, talking with your doctor is a good first step. Asking the right questions during your conversation will help you know what to expect and how to better navigate your condition. Familiarize yourself with these common terms before your appointment to help facilitate your discussion.

Vocabulary to Know
Your doctor might mention these common terms. Here’s what they mean.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dopamine</td>
<td>A brain chemical that normally controls coordination and movement in the body. In Parkinson’s disease, nerve cells that produce dopamine become impaired and/or die.</td>
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<td>Substantia Nigra</td>
<td>A crescent-shaped mass of dopamine-producing nerve cells located near the base of the brain. Cells in this region are damaged or destroyed in Parkinson’s disease.</td>
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<td>Tremor</td>
<td>Shaking of the hands, arms, legs, jaw, lips, or tongue that is out of a person’s control. A classic tremor associated with Parkinson’s disease is a “pill-rolling” tremor (when a person rubs their thumb and forefinger back and forth).</td>
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<td>Bradykinesia</td>
<td>A slowness of movement that eventually affects everyone with Parkinson’s disease.</td>
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<td>Freezing</td>
<td>The temporary and sudden inability to initiate or continue moving. Common triggers of this phenomenon include walking through doorways or turning around.</td>
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<td>Rigidity</td>
<td>Stiffness or “tightness” of the arms, legs, or body that usually starts on one side of the body. As Parkinson’s disease progresses, both sides of the body are affected.</td>
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<td>Postural Instability</td>
<td>A loss of balance and tendency to fall that usually occurs in the later stages of Parkinson’s disease.</td>
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<td>Levodopa</td>
<td>The “gold standard” and most effective drug for treating the symptoms of Parkinson’s disease. Available in several formulations, levodopa is almost always taken with another compound called carbidopa (prevents levodopa from being broken down into dopamine before it crosses into the brain).</td>
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<td>“Off” Episodes</td>
<td>The period of time when levodopa begins to lose its effect and symptoms, like tremor or stiffness, return before the next scheduled levodopa dose is due.</td>
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<td>Lewy Bodies</td>
<td>Abnormal, toxic clumps of protein that form within brain cells affected by Parkinson’s disease. A protein called alpha-synuclein is the main substance found in Lewy bodies and is currently being targeted as a therapy for Parkinson’s disease.</td>
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Questions to Ask
These questions will help you start a conversation with your doctor about how to best manage your Parkinson’s disease.

About Symptoms
- What non-motor symptoms (those that are not related to movement) does Parkinson’s disease cause?
- What complications are associated with Parkinson’s disease?
- How do I reach you if I develop new neurological symptoms?

About Causes & Risk Factors
- Is Parkinson’s disease hereditary?
- What brain changes are associated with Parkinson’s disease?
- Are there any lifestyle factors linked to the development or worsening of Parkinson’s disease?

About Diagnosis
- Is there a laboratory or imaging test that can diagnose Parkinson’s disease?
- How can I be so sure I don’t actually have another movement disorder?

About Treatment
- If my symptoms are mild and not affecting my quality of life, do I have to take medication?
- Are there any surgical therapies available to treat Parkinson’s disease?
- What is the latest research on therapies that can potentially slow the progression of Parkinson’s disease?

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About Coping with Parkinson’s disease

- I heard that aerobic exercise can reduce the symptoms of Parkinson’s disease. What is the best form of exercise for me?
- Who can help me plan for my future care (e.g., transportation and help with household chores and finances)?
- I want to meet other people living with Parkinson’s disease. Do you recommend any specific support groups?

About Living with Parkinson’s disease

- How can I make my home safe to reduce my risk of falling?
- Do I need to undergo a driving evaluation because of my Parkinson’s disease?
- Are there specific foods that can help ease my symptoms and/or increase the effectiveness of my medication?

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