

Daily Living

Parkinson's Disease

Parkinson's disease is a progressive slowly evolving neurological disease. It mainly affects parts of the brain controlling movement. Brain cells produce an important chemical called dopamine. These cells are in a brain structure called the *substantia nigra*. Dopamine is involved in producing movements that are smooth and coordinated.

Many people have symptoms between the ages of 50 and 60 years, but some develop symptoms at a much younger age, others at a much older age. Over time, the symptoms may get worse and may change to include more/different symptoms than when first diagnosed. This usually happens slowly. As symptoms start to interfere with how you are able to do everyday things, there are treatments that can help you.

WHAT CAUSES PARKINSON'S DISEASE?

For reasons that we don't yet understand, the cells that produce dopamine start to not function properly. They don't make enough dopamine for movements ensuring that movements are smooth. To date, no one knows exactly how and why Parkinson's disease starts. Lots of researchers are trying to find the answers. So far it looks as if aging, the environment (toxins or poisons) and genetic abnormalities may trigger neurological changes leading to Parkinson's disease.

HOW IS PARKINSON'S DISEASE DIAGNOSED?

Usually, a neurologist or family doctor will enquire about your medical history and examine you. They will make the diagnosis on what they see and on the information you provide them. There is no blood test or laboratory exam that diagnoses Parkinson's disease. An MRI or CT or CT scan may be ordered so the physician knows that nothing else is going on (tumor, small stroke or other things). Medication is only started when symptoms interfere with what you want to do on a daily basis. Discuss this with your physician.

Always remember – you are unique!

How Parkinson's disease will affect you will not be identical to someone else with Parkinson's disease.

While there is not yet a cure, many options are available to help you live life to the fullest and retain your capacity to function!

**Parkinson Québec
is there to help you!**



WHAT DOES PARKINSON'S DISEASE LOOK LIKE?

Initially, most people will notice changes on one side of the body. It may be tremors while resting; smaller handwriting; a feeling of slowing down; the face may lose some of its expression so looking bored or depressed, even if this is not the case, and even before receiving the diagnosis. Everyone is different as well as the changes occurring in our body. Be vigilant.

There are four main motor symptoms that a physician will look for in making a diagnosis of Parkinson's disease:

- Tremor – involuntary movements when the hands or the legs are just resting. However, tremors are mitigated when voluntary movements are performed.
- Bradykinesia - slow movements when moving, i.e. everything is slowed down and it takes more of an effort to move.
- Rigidity - stiffness of muscles usually detected by your physician or healthcare team during the clinical examination.
- Difficulties with walking and balance: footsteps get smaller; you may have a slight limp.

There are many other symptoms that people with Parkinson's disease may experience as time goes on. These include:

- constipation;
- changes in swallowing ;
- fatigue ;
- mood changes ;
- sleep disorder;
- changes in speech ;
- cognitive changes (memory, thinking).

If you experience any of these symptoms, Parkinson Québec has specific information that may be helpful to you.

Help yourself live well with Parkinson's disease by:

- arming yourself with good information;
- finding a support group (family or friends);
- exercising (continue or start!);
- making sure that you keep your healthcare team up to date on how you are doing.

