

## EARLY SYMPTOMS

In recent years, advances in research have shown that Parkinson's disease can begin well before the clear onset of motor symptoms. **This initial phase** is marked by changes that are now better understood.

These first signs, known as **early symptoms**, may include a reduced or complete loss of smell, constipation, mood disorders such as depression, and Rapid eye movement (REM) sleep behaviour disorder, which can gradually be accompanied by subtle changes in motor skills.

Their occurrence may be linked to the **early stages of the disease**. However, many of these symptoms are widespread in the general population and may be caused by conditions other than Parkinson's disease.

## REDUCED OR LOST SENSE OF SMELL

**Hyposmia**, or the reduced ability to detect and differentiate smells, is one of the **most common early signs** of Parkinson's disease.

It can appear over 20 years before motor symptoms. Hyposmia progresses slowly and, by the time Parkinson's disease is diagnosed, the loss of smell is often already significant, sometimes reduced to less than half of normal capacity.

Smell and taste are closely related senses, and hyposmia may also impact flavor perception. However, a diminished sense of smell can also be linked to other factors such as respiratory tract infections, rhinitis or allergies, age, smoking or exposure to chemicals.

## CONSTIPATION

Constipation is one of the early symptoms of Parkinson's disease and can appear 12 to 20 years before motor disorders.

It often results from a malfunction of the autonomic nervous system, which regulates gastrointestinal activity, leading to a slowdown in intestinal transit.

However, constipation can also be linked to other factors such as a diet low in fibre and water or the use of certain drugs, particularly painkillers.



## RAPID EYE MOVEMENT SLEEP BEHAVIOUR DISORDER

(RBD)

RBD is an early symptom associated with a **high risk** of developing Parkinson's disease. It can occur 10 to 15 years before diagnosis.

It is a sleep condition in which a person physically acts out their dreams. They may shout, talk or make uncontrollable, sometimes sudden movements, such as kicking, punching or falling out of bed. People with RBD may be more likely to develop Parkinson's disease and experience motor symptoms earlier.

When these symptoms are present, it is advisable to consult a healthcare professional for a **thorough sleep assessment**.

## MOOD DISORDERS

Anxiety, apathy and depression are associated with an increased risk of developing Parkinson's disease. These symptoms may coexist and appear 5 to 10 years before diagnosis.

**Anxiety** is characterized by excessive worry, nervousness or agitation, often accompanied by gastrointestinal disturbances, increased sweating and rapid heartbeat. **Apathy** refers to a lack of motivation and initiative, combined with an absence of goal-oriented behaviour, sometimes leading to the abandonment of activities that were once enjoyed.

**Depression** manifests itself through sadness, feelings of guilt, low self-esteem and sometimes remorse.



Mood disorders do not cause Parkinson's disease. Appropriate management is essential to improve quality of life, as treatment options are available. Medication, psychotherapy and social support are the main approaches.

## CHANGES IN MOTOR SKILLS

Subtle changes in motor functions, such as slowed movements, muscle stiffness or a loss of precision in movements, problems with salivation and micrographia (small, cramped handwriting) may gradually appear several years before diagnosis.

## PREVENTIVE MEASURES

It is important to keep in mind that not everyone who experiences the symptoms described here will necessarily develop Parkinson's disease.

However, if these signs appear, it is best to seek the advice of a healthcare professional.

Identifying and managing these symptoms is essential to providing appropriate care and anticipating the needs of those affected.

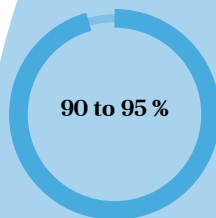
Certain lifestyle choices play a key role in preventing and managing the disease.

For instance, **maintaining good sleep habits** and eating a healthy, balanced diet high in fibre, fruit and vegetables promotes overall health and wellbeing.

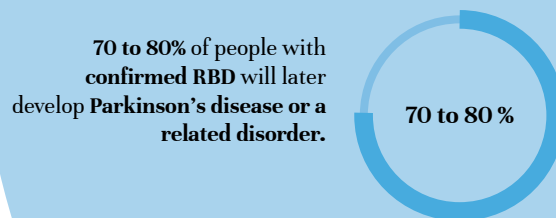
Ongoing research is looking into whether physical activity could not only slow the progression of the disease but also help prevent it.



## KEY FACTS



90 to 95% of people living with Parkinson's disease have experienced early symptoms.



70 to 80% of people with confirmed RBD will later develop Parkinson's disease or a related disorder.

Reduction or lost sense of smell is one of the early symptoms, present in up to 90% of people before diagnosis.

Parkinson Québec provides information and raises awareness about Parkinson's disease, supports the community, and promotes scientific research in collaboration with its regional partners.



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<https://parkinsonquebec.ca>



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