

Parkinson's Disease

What is Parkinson's?

Parkinson's is a progressive neurological condition. People with Parkinson's don't have enough of the chemical dopamine in the brain. This may cause some of the following:

- **Tremor:** involuntary shaking, trembling or quivering movements of the muscles
- **Rigidity:** Increased tone, causing stiffness/freezing
- **Bradykinesia:** this is slowness of movement, difficulty initiating, executing and halting a movement
- **Reduced sensory awareness:** reduced ability to self-monitor
- **Cognitive difficulties:** difficulties maintaining and switching focus of attention, problem-solving, decision making, forward planning and visual perception.

A combination of the symptoms caused by Parkinson's can lead to difficulties in communication and swallowing.

If you wish to know more information about your diagnosis and support available in your area, please visit the charity website on www.parkinsons.org.uk

How can Parkinson's affect communication?

75% - 89% of people with Parkinson's experience difficulty with their communication: Typical characteristics include:

- Slurred speech (dysarthria)
- A monotonous/hoarse/unsteady/quiet voice quality
- Difficulty initiating speech, difficulty initiating and taking turns in conversation
- Reduced motivation to communicate
- Reduced facial expression (masked)
- Small hand-writing

Reduced body language, including hand gestures

40% - 60% of people with Parkinson's experience decreased cognitive functioning, which may also impact communication. People may experience:

- Slow thinking/slow learning/reduced attention and inability to follow fast conversations
- Losing one's train of thought while speaking
- Difficulties problem-solving and forward planning
- Problems storing and retrieving memories
- Difficulty making sense of perceptions/concepts
- Problems with lineage (e.g. word-finding difficulties)

How can speech and language therapy help?

Your speech and language therapist can:

- Offer advice/strategies and provide specific exercises/programmes to help improve speech intelligibility
- Introduce alternative communication systems, which can help you to express yourself if speech becomes difficult.

How can Parkinson's affect swallowing?

Many people living with Parkinson's have some problems with eating and drinking. The medical term for this is dysphagia. You may have dysphagia if you have any of the following symptoms:

- Coughing/choking when eating or drinking
- Drooling and poor saliva management
- Poor lip seal
- Difficulty clearing and controlling food/drink in the mouth
- Delayed swallow reflex
- Food sticking in throat

- Gurgly voice
- Problems swallowing medication
- Discomfort in chest or throat
- Recurrent chest infections
- Heartburn or reflux
- Fatigue when eating and drinking
- Reduced oral intake, resulting in malnutrition, weight loss and reduced energy, dehydration and constipation

How can speech and Language therapy help?

It is important to identify symptoms of swallowing difficulties early. The Speech and Language Therapist can offer advice regarding swallowing techniques, food /drink texture modification (dependent on the stage of your condition) and saliva management.

They can provide compensatory strategies to help ensure food and drink is being swallowed safely. Alternative methods of eating and drinking (e.g. feeding tubes) may need to be explored in the long-term.

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How to contact us

Speech and Language Therapy Departments Office hours: Monday-Friday 9am - 4.30pm

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Useful contacts

North Specialist Team at Darlington Memorial Hospital – 01325 743 000

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Charity Website: www.parkinsons.org.uk

Contact details



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If you would like to talk to someone outside the service contact the **Patient Experience Team** on **0800 783 5774**, or email cdda-tr.PatientExperienceCDDFT@nhs.net.

We can make this information available in Braille, large print, audio or other languages on request.