

TIPS FOR COPING WITH PARKINSON'S DISEASE

(Compiled from various web sources)

Coping with daily tasks can be made easier by getting the help of an occupational therapist. An occupational therapist can identify how Parkinson's disease symptoms interfere with independence and suggest new ways of doing things or home care aids and equipment to make life easier.

Parkinson's disease and tips for dressing

Simple activities like getting dressed in the morning can take a lot of effort for people with Parkinson's disease. Rigidity and slow movements can make putting on clothes time consuming. Keep things simple by following a set routine.

- Lay out clothes for someone in order of how they are to be put on
 - Allow for plenty of extra time
 - Make sure a person is sitting to dress. Sitting on a firm chair is preferable to a soft low bed
 - Dress the affected side first
 - Choose clothes that are easy to put on
 - Wear clothes with Velcro fasteners instead of buttons, zip pullers, elastic waists, bras that hook at the front, clothes with back closures
 - Move items in cupboards so they can be easily reached
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Parkinson's disease and tips for personal hygiene

Falls in slippery bathrooms are a real danger for someone with Parkinson's disease. Attending to personal hygiene can be difficult for someone with poor balance and coordination. Make showering easier and safer by:

- Installing grab rails in and outside the shower recess to increase stability and protect against slips and falls
 - Using a stable shower seat to sit on whilst showering with a hand held hose
 - Place rubber mats on slippery tiles
 - Use an electric toothbrush for brushing teeth
 - Attach soft grip handles to brushes and combs
 - Use soap on tap to avoid soap residue in the shower
 - Use an electric razor
 - Gather all equipment before you begin
 - Ensure someone is wearing his or her medical alarm pendant
 - Use a raised toilet seat to ease transferring on and off a toilet
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Parkinson's disease and tips for meal times

In the later stages of Parkinson's disease, problems with speech and swallowing can become more severe.

Maintaining a nutritious diet is important for everyone as they age, but people with Parkinson's disease can find meal times challenging. Tremor can make handling utensils or preparing food extremely hard.

People with Parkinson's disease can have problems with drooling, moving food in the mouth and chewing.

Eating and drinking adequate amounts is not only essential for good nutrition but it also aids the digestion of medications for Parkinson's disease. Constipation can also be a common problem. A dietitian can recommend a healthy meal plan for someone with Parkinson's disease.

Home care aids can make meal times easier and more enjoyable.

- Utensils with special grip, deep spoons or angled utensils can help to scoop food from a plate
- Plate guards create a lip on a dish enabling a person to scoop out food without spilling
- Rocker knives help to safely cut up food without sawing back and forth

If a person has any problems with swallowing or eating they should be referred to a speech pathologist for assessment.

Parkinson's disease and tips for communicating

Difficulty communicating can be distressing for someone with Parkinson's disease. People with Parkinson's disease can have speech problems such as difficulty pronouncing words, slurred or soft muffled voice.

A speech pathologist can suggest ways to improve speech or devices to assist with communication. Communication boards or electronic devices can help people who can no longer write things down.

Seek the advice of a speech pathologist or occupational therapist before purchasing any equipment.

Parkinson's disease can affect many aspects of a person's daily life. However, with careful planning and activity moderation, the effects of Parkinson's can become much less stressful and intrusive.

The following suggestions offer guidance to overcome some of the difficulties associated with the disease.

- **Plan periods of rest.** Be sure to get plenty of rest. You may need to plan at least one rest period every day. If you have swelling in your feet or ankles, elevate your legs when you are resting or sitting for prolonged periods. Avoid working long days. Rest between recreation and leisure activities.
- **Conserve your energy.** Using less energy with daily tasks can help you have more energy to do more activities during the day. You may need to cut down on some of your activities or use energy-saving devices or techniques. If daily self care or home care activities are too tiring, discuss this with your doctor.

Energy Conserving Tips for Those With Parkinson's Disease

- Simplify your tasks and set realistic goals. Don't think you have to do things the same way you've always done them.
- Plan your activities (chores, exercise, and recreation) ahead of time. Space them out throughout the day. Do not schedule too many things to do in one day. Do the things that take more energy when you are feeling your best.
- If needed, rest before and after activities.
- If you become tired during an activity, stop and rest. You may need to finish it on another day or when you feel less tired.
- Do not plan activities right after a meal. Rest 20-30 minutes after each meal.
- Ask for help. Divide the tasks among family and friends.
- Get a good night's sleep and elevate your head when sleeping. Be careful not to nap too much during the day or you might not be able to sleep at night.
- If your doctor says it's ok, you may climb steps. You may need to rest part of the way if you become tired. Try to arrange your activities so you do not have to climb up and down stairs many times during the day.
- Avoid extreme physical activity. Do not push, pull, or lift heavy objects (more than 10 pounds) that require you to strain.

Getting Dressed With Parkinson's Disease

- Get dressed while sitting in a chair that has armrests -- this will help you keep your balance.
- Roll from side to side to get pants over your hips. You can do this while sitting in a chair or lying down on your bed.
- Wear clothes that are loose fitting and have elastic waistbands.
- Choose wrap-around clothing instead of the pullover type. Also choose clothing that opens in the front, not the back so you don't have to reach behind you.
- Wear clothing with large, flat buttons, zippers, or Velcro closures.
- Use a button hook to button clothing.
- Use a dressing stick if you have shoulder weakness to get your coat or shirt on or off.
- Use a zipper pull or attach a leather loop on the end of the zipper to zip pants or jackets.
- Wear slip-on shoes or buy elastic shoelaces that allow you to slip your shoes on and off without untying the laces. Use devices such as a sock donner and long-handled shoehorn for additional assistance.

Bathing With Parkinson's Disease

- Use a shower chair if necessary.
- Use a hand-held hose for showering and bathing.
- Use a long-handled sponge or scrubbing brush.
- Use soap-on-a-rope, bath mitts, or sponges with soap inside or a soft soap applicator instead of bar soap.
- Use lukewarm water, as very hot water can cause fatigue.
- Sew straps on towels to make them easier to hold while drying.
- Place a non-skid rug on the floor outside the tub to dry your feet so you don't slip.
- Put a towel on the back of your chair and rub your back against it to dry. Or, use a terry cloth robe instead of a towel to dry off.

Going to the Bathroom With Parkinson's Disease

- If needed, use a bedside commode.
- In the bathroom, use an elevated toilet seat and/or safety rails to assist standing from a low surface.

Grooming With Parkinson's Disease

- Do all of your grooming (shaving, drying your hair, etc) while sitting.
- Use hairbrushes and combs with built-up handles or handles with finger loops.
- Use toothbrushes with built-up handles or use an electric toothbrush.

Eating, Drinking, and Parkinson's Disease

- Don't rush your meals. Allow the extra time you need to finish your meal. Rest your elbows on the table to provide more motion at your wrist and hand.
- Sit with your knees and hips bent at a 90-degree angle in a straight-back chair.
- Use utensils with built-up, lightweight handles, or use a "spork" -- a spoon and fork in one. Use a rocker knife for cutting food.
- Use a non-skid mat to stabilize objects on the table.
- Use a plate guard or plate with a raised lip to prevent food from spilling.
- Use a long straw with a non-spill cup or use a plastic mug with a large handle.

Cooking With Parkinson's Disease

- Use the back burners and keep pot handles turned inward.

To Prevent Drooling or Salivating

- Suck on hard candy, lozenges, or gum to control excess saliva
- Use a straw when drinking to strengthen the muscles of the lips, mouth, and throat.

Writing Tips for Parkinson's Disease

- Use large print, instead of script writing. Try using weighted pens or pencils and wrap black electrical tape around the barrel for additional grip.
- Use magic markers and large tablet on an easel.
- If you have difficulty using writing utensils, try typing notes or letters on a computer or typewriter.

Parkinson's Disease and Shopping

- Call ahead to make sure the store has the item you need.
- Call ahead to reserve a wheelchair or tri-wheel cart if you aren't planning to bring your own.
- Call a taxi or ask a friend or family member to drive you.

Cleaning Tips for Those With Parkinson's

- Use long handles on sponge mops, cleaning brushes, dust pans, brooms, or window washers.
- Sit to fold laundry, wash dishes, iron clothes, use the sweeper, mop the floor, or to plug in appliances at low outlets. Adapt counters so that you can reach them from your wheelchair or from a sitting position.

Sitting and Standing

- Bend slowly at the waist and touch your toes before trying to rise from a seated position.
- Once standing, remain in place for a few seconds before trying to walk. This will help you regain your balance.
- Place an additional cushion or book to add height to your chairs and add firmness, this will help you to decrease the distance when sitting or standing.
- To make it easier to get out of bed, tie a sheet to the bed post and knot the other end so you can grasp the sheet to rise to a sitting position.

Easing Cramps, Spasms, or Tremors Due to Parkinson's

- Massage (or have someone else massage) your legs nightly to relieve leg cramps.
- Take warm baths and use heating pads to help relieve muscle spasms and ease cramps.
- Use mineral ice to relax sore joints and muscles.
- Squeeze a small rubber ball to reduce hand tremors.
- At first indication of a tremor, if possible, try lying on the floor, face down, and relaxing your body for five to 10 minutes.

Parkinson's Disease and "Freezing"

- Count your steps as you walk.
- Rock in place from foot to foot to get moving again if you become frozen.
- Have someone place their foot in front of you, or visualize something you need to step over, to get moving again.

Other Tips for Those With Parkinson's Disease

- Purchase a small battery-powered alarm pillbox to help you remember your medication schedule.
- Use a speaker phone or telephone headset to ease the problem of hand tremors while talking on the phone.
- Install an intercom system or purchase walkie-talkies to make contact within the home easier.

Falls are a frequent complication of Parkinson's disease, and preventing falls is very important. While there are many things that you can do to reduce your risk for falls, the two most important things are to work with your doctor to ensure that your treatments are optimal and to consult with a physical therapist who can assess your walking and balance. The physical therapist is the expert when it comes to recommending assistive devices or exercises to improve safety.

Falls and Common Household Hazards

If you or a loved one has Parkinson's disease, here are tips for preventing falls around the home:

- **Floors.** Remove all loose wires, cords, and throw rugs. Minimize clutter. Make sure rugs are anchored and smooth. Keep furniture in its accustomed place.
- **Bathroom.** Install grab bars and nonskid tape in the tub or shower. Use nonskid bath mats on the floor or install wall-to-wall carpeting.
- **Lighting.** Make sure halls, stairways, and entrances are well lit. Install a night light in your bathroom or hallway. Make sure there is a light switch at the top and bottom of the staircase. Turn lights on if you get up in the middle of the night. Make sure lamps or light switches are within reach of the bed if you have to get up during the night.
- **Kitchen.** Install nonskid rubber mats near the sink and stove. Clean up spills immediately.
- **Stairs.** Make sure treads, rails, and rugs are secure. Install a rail on both sides of the stairs. If stairs are a threat, it may be helpful to arrange most of your activities on the lower level to reduce the number of times stairs must be climbed.
- **Entrances and doorways.** Install metal handles on the walls adjacent to doorknobs of all doors to make it more secure as you travel through the doorway.

Tips for Maintaining Balance With Parkinson's Disease

- Keep at least one hand free at all times; try using a backpack or fanny pack to hold things rather than carrying them in your hands. Never carry objects in both hands when walking as this interferes with balance.
- Attempt to swing both arms from front to back while walking. This may require a conscious effort if Parkinson's disease has diminished your movement, however, it will help you to maintain balance, posture, and reduce fatigue.
- Consciously lift your feet off of the ground when walking. Shuffling and dragging of the feet may cause you to lose your balance.
- When trying to navigate turns, use a "U" technique of facing forward and making a wide turn, rather than pivoting sharply.
- Try to stand with your feet shoulder width apart. When your feet are close together for any length of time, you increase your risk of losing your balance and falling.
- Do one thing at a time! Don't try to walk and accomplish another task, such as reading or looking around. The decrease in your automatic reflexes complicates motor function, so the less distraction, the better!
- Do not wear rubber or gripping soled shoes, they may "catch" on the floor and cause tripping.
- Move slowly when changing positions. Use deliberate, concentrated movements and if needed, use a grab bar or walking aid. Count 15 seconds between each movement. For example, when rising from a seated position, wait 15 seconds after standing to begin walking.
- If you become "frozen," visualize stepping over an imaginary object, or have someone place their foot in front of yours to step over. Try not to have a caregiver or companion "pull" you, this may throw you off balance and even prolong the episode.
- If balance is a continuous problem, you may want to consider a walking aid such as a cane, walking stick, or walker. Once you've mastered walking with help, you may be ready to try it on your own again!

OTHER RESOURCES –

Publications on a range of topics that can be downloaded from the **UK Parkinson's Disease Society** website -

www.parkinsons.org.uk/advice/publications.aspx

Other useful resources –

National Parkinson Foundation, USA

www.parkinson.org

Parkinson's Disease Foundation, USA

www.pdf.org