

The Comfort of Home™

Caregiver Assistance News

"CARING FOR YOU... CARING FOR OTHERS"

Understanding Parkinson's Disease

Taking the Mystery Out of the Shakiness

"It's all about losing your brain without losing your mind."

Michael J. Fox

(on his fight against Parkinson's)

Parkinson's disease (PD) is a neurological disorder that affects more than four million people worldwide. Although it is a slowly progressive disorder that is life altering, it is not life threatening. Recent advances in medication and surgery mean that doctors and patients now have better control over the condition than ever before.

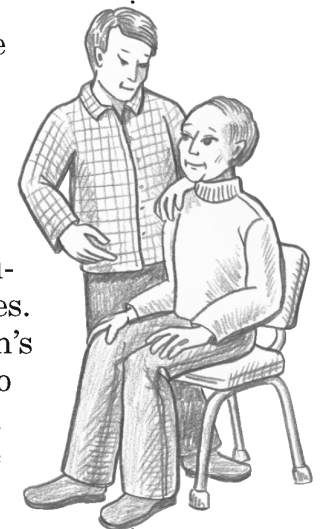
Parkinson's is caused by the loss or *degeneration* of nerve cells that produce a substance called dopamine in the brain. Dopamine is an important chemical messenger or *neurotransmitter*. The loss of dopamine-containing cells affects the body's ability to control normal movements. The symptoms of Parkinson's first begin to appear when the levels of dopamine in the brain fall below about 20% of normal.

Young-onset Parkinson's

Average age at diagnosis is 60 years, however, one in 20 people with Parkinson's first develop symptoms between the ages of 21 and 40.

Symptoms

Not everyone will experience exactly the same symptoms at the same time. The disease can affect everyone very differently and in some cases it may be many years before there is any disability or significant limitation of daily activities. In the early stages of Parkinson's disease, symptoms often tend to affect one side of the body first, and then later on spread to the other side of the body



Typical Symptoms:

- **Shakiness or trembling** in the hands, arms, legs, jaw and face; referred to as *tremor*
- **Stiffness or rigidity**—where muscles become tight and stiff
- **Slowness of movement**—difficulty initiating movements, like getting up from a chair
- **Problems with balance** and co-ordination, which are usually late in the disease

In addition, sleep disturbances, depression, difficulties with speech or swallowing, and memory loss can occur later in the disease. Many of these symptoms can be improved with medications.

A way to prevent or cure PD has not been found, however, the symptoms can be effectively controlled using a combination of medical approaches.

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available from...

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The Importance of Exercise

Water, because of the buoyancy effect, is an excellent place for anyone with Parkinson's to exercise. Water helps ease the burden of moving and is fun.

Because PD causes slowness of movement, muscle rigidity and joint stiffness, daily tasks such as rising from a chair or turning in bed can become difficult. Exercise, especially water exercise, allows muscles to relax, lengthen, and reduce stiffness.

The doctor can refer the patient to a physical therapist to create an individualized exercise program. Visits to an occupational or physical therapist are usually covered by medical insurance with a referral from a doctor.

Source: American Parkinson's Disease Association.

Adapted from The Comfort of Home: An Illustrated Step-by-Step Guide for Caregivers, © 2006 CareTrust Publications, www.comfortofhome.com

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Treatment

Caregivers and patients work with the doctor to find the right balance of medications to effectively manage the symptoms of PD. Treatment is generally started with low doses of a drug; this dose is then gradually increased until the required control over the symptoms is achieved. The doctor will recommend a particular treatment depending on the patient's specific symptoms. The dose and timing of medications may need to be adjusted over time as symptoms change (or side effects occur). A combination of different medications is often required to provide the most effective symptom control.

Medication Tips

It is important that caregivers understand:

- *How much* medication should be taken.
- *When* medication should be taken, e.g. before, with or after food.
- What *other types* of medication should **not** be combined with the current medication

Any side effects experienced from the medication should be mentioned to the doctor.

Tip Avoid starting a new medication when you will not have access to a doctor or other healthcare professional, such as during holidays, or before going on a trip.

Source: American Parkinson's Disease Association www.apda.org; European Parkinson's Disease Association (EPDA) [http://www.epda.eu.com/National Parkinson's Disease Association \(NPF\) www.parkinson.org](http://www.epda.eu.com/National Parkinson's Disease Association (NPF) www.parkinson.org)



I D E A E X C H A N G E

How would you manage this?

Question: The person in my care seems fine and all of a sudden she loses balance and becomes very difficult to deal with. Why does this happen?



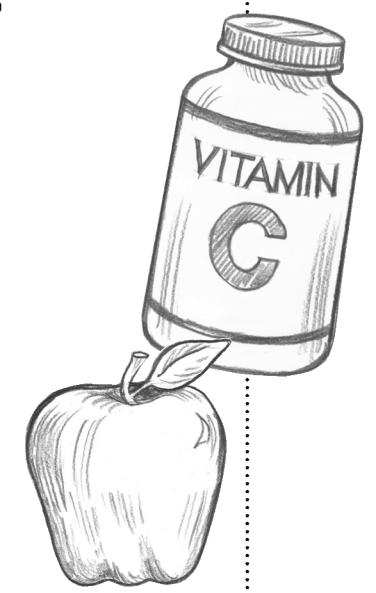
Answer: She may be experiencing what is called the *wearing-off* of medications. *Wearing-off* is where the patient begins to feel that the improvement gained from a dose of levodopa medication gradually diminishes and does not last until the time that the next dose of medication is due. This feeling has often been likened to a car gradually running out of gasoline. It is important to recognize the changes in the patient's symptoms that may indicate she is experiencing *wearing-off*, since it may be possible to adjust her therapy to better control the symptoms.

Since Parkinson's is a slowly progressive condition, over time symptoms may change and evolve. The symptoms can vary for each person, which means that everyone's experience of the condition is different. Visit www.epda.eu.com for a *wearing-off* question card.

Taking Care of Yourself—Vitamin Supplements


We all see advertisements that claim we need to take vitamin supplements even though—if you eat a good diet and are healthy—you most likely don't need them. Not every person should take the same diet supplements, so talk to your doctor before you begin. Ask your doctor if you need to take calcium, vitamin D, B-12, or folic acid. If you are advised to take them, remember supplements don't work right away. You need to take them for a while to find out if they are helping you. Remember, you cannot effectively help the person in your care if you don't take care of yourself, so be sure your diet has plenty of fruits, vegetables, grains and protein.

Source: *What To Do For Senior Health*; Institute for Healthcare Advancement



Live Life Laughing!

When you feed a dog,
he thinks *you* are God.



When you feed
a cat,
he thinks
he is God.

Guard Your Heart

Women who walk at a brisk pace for at least three hours *a week* reduce their risk for heart attacks and other coronary events by 35% compared to women who walk infrequently.

Source:
Strong Women, Strong Hearts;
Miriam E. Nelson

Inspiration

*Because of our routines,
we forget that life is an
ongoing adventure.*

Maya Angelou