



Understanding Parkinson's Disease

A Guide to Management



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Second Edition, August 2010

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Introduction

Resthaven Community Services offer rehabilitation, maintenance and support aimed at improving quality of life for older people. Multi disciplinary teams of allied health professionals provide treatment programs which are based on individual needs.

This booklet has been designed to assist you to understand Parkinson's Disease. Please speak with your health care professional if you have any queries.

Understanding Parkinson's Disease

Parkinson's Disease is a neurological condition that affects the area known as the Basal Ganglia in the middle of the brain.

The Basal Ganglia is a collection of nerve centres that work together and communicate with other areas of the brain to begin and control automatic movement—movement that is not controlled consciously.

A way to think about this part of the brain, is to imagine it is a book that holds the plans for all the movement you have learned during your life and perform often such as walking, getting out of bed, washing your hair and eating. It also puts small movements together in sequence to enable you to complete a task or movement.

To work correctly, the Basal Ganglia uses a chemical called Dopamine; this chemical is a neurotransmitter and allows nerve cells to communicate with each other.

Parkinson's Disease occurs when not enough Dopamine can be produced because the cells responsible for production have died. Think of it as having a problem opening the plans or keeping the book open at the correct page.

Problems will occur with movement when we try to do tasks without thinking about them.

Parkinson's Disease has no cure, but there are strategies to enable you to move normally.

Understanding Parkinson's Disease (continued)

In summary:

- » Parkinson's Disease affects the brain
- » It is caused by a lack of Dopamine
- » It interferes with automatic movement
- » It affects those living with the disease differently as not everyone experiences all the symptoms.

The most commonly experienced symptoms are:

- » Tremors
- » Rigidity or 'stiffness' in the muscles
- » Slowing of movements (hypokinesia)
- » Difficulty starting movement (motor block) or stopping in the middle of movement (freezing) and having difficulty continuing
- » Postural instability (poor balance, unsteadiness on standing or when moving from sitting to standing).

You may notice that, just as your body movement is affected, your thinking may also be slower, or you may have problems changing from one thought to another.

Parkinson's can also affect bodily function such as speech and swallowing, bladder and bowel control.

Experiences of pain and unusual sensations have also been reported.

Medications

There are a variety of medications that can be used to reduce the impact of Parkinson's on movement. The most widely used are Dopamine replacements, which give the brain the Dopamine that it can no longer produce, combined with other chemicals to allow them to be absorbed effectively.

These include:

- » Madopar (Levodopa and Benzerazide)
- » Sinemet, Levohexal and Kinson (Levodopa and Carbidopa).

The medication enables you to move more freely. Think of it as helping you open the “plan” or keep the correct page open in the book of plans. For best effect:

- » Try taking it before food (half an hour before is best). If it combines with food in the stomach, especially protein, its absorption will be slowed and it may be less effective.
- » Wait half an hour after your first dose before you start your daily activities. Showering, dressing, making breakfast will all be easier and less tiring if the medication is working to assist you.
- » Plan your activity to take advantage of your medication. You will move more freely in the middle of your medication period.

Medications (continued)

Sometimes people notice they begin to “slow down” as they approach the time to take their next dose. This is referred to as “going off” / “being off”. It may take a particular period of time after taking medication before you can move freely again. When this movement occurs, it is referred to as “being on”.

Take note of these fluctuations and plan your activity to take account of this.

There are a number of health professionals who can assist you overcome some of the difficulties caused by Parkinson’s.

- » Physiotherapy
- » Occupational Therapy
- » Podiatry
- » Speech Pathology
- » Continence Nurse Advisor
- » Social Worker.

All these services are available at Resthaven. You may like to take individual brochures about these services. We can also help you make contact with others such as:

- » Dieticians
- » Psychologists, and
- » Resthaven’s Parkinson’s Self-Management Program.

Overcoming Movement Difficulties

As previously mentioned, movement difficulty occurs with automatic or well-learned movement that we don't generally give much attention to.

To help overcome movement difficulty, STOP, and give the brain cues and prompts, such as:

- » Doing one thing at a time
- » Thinking about what you will do and how you will do it before you begin
- » Concentrating on the task as you do it
- » Breaking long or complicated tasks into smaller parts and concentrate on each 'part' until it is completed.

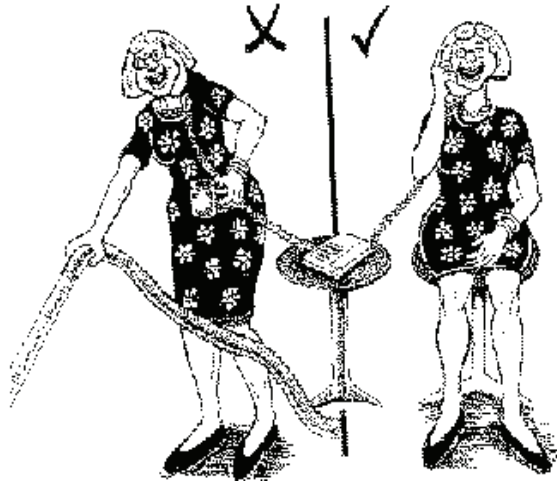
If you are giving yourself a prompt, be short, simple, and specific. Be sure to give information your brain can use, for example "long steps" or "heel first" will be more effective in assisting walking than "get moving".

These strategies are also useful for thinking tasks.

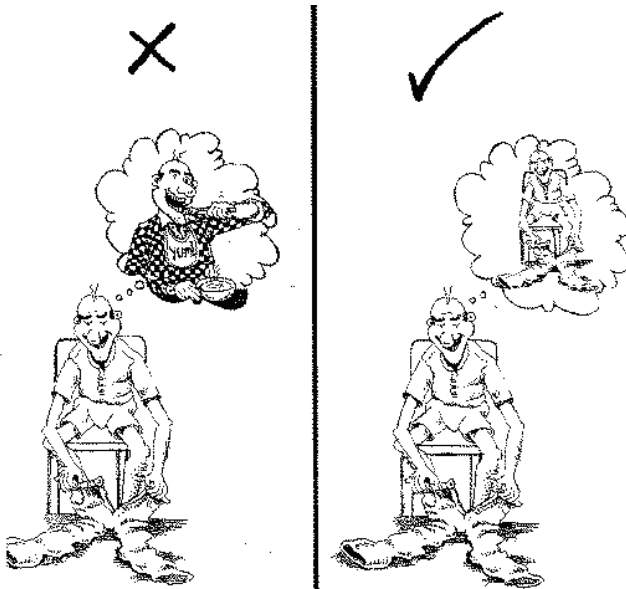
As Parkinson's disease is an individual experience, we encourage you to contact our therapy staff to discuss your difficulties and work with them to improve your movement, maintain your independence and continue with the activities of your choice.

Please speak with us for more information.

Do one thing at a time



Think about each movement before you do it



Concentrate on each movement as you do it

1



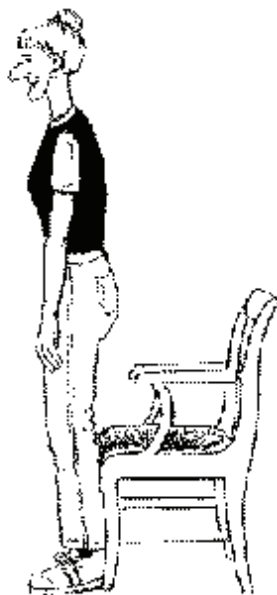
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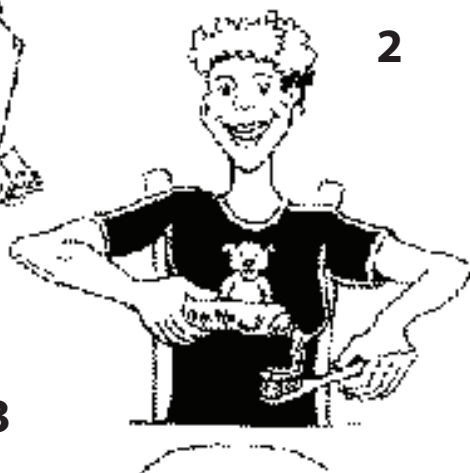
3



4



Break up long movement sequences into separate steps





An Australian Government Initiative

Resthaven Therapy Services

Locations

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For more information about this and other services offered by Resthaven, visit:

www.resthaven.asn.au

Fees

Resthaven Therapy Services are funded by the Department of Health and Ageing. However, as this funding does not cover the full cost of services a small contribution towards the cost is appreciated.