

Living with Parkinson's disease

Health Column

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World Parkinson's Day will be held on 11 April with the aim of raising awareness of Parkinson's disease and how it affects individuals, families and the wider community. Worldwide, people will walk, run, cycle, dance, attend conferences and dinners, deliver speeches, donate time and money, and generally give themselves to help find a cure for Parkinson's disease.



Parkinson's disease is a disorder of the central nervous system (CNS), and it is one of many neurological conditions. Its cause is a loss of nerve cells in the brain, from a variety of reasons including age, hormones, and injury. Individuals with Parkinson's disease have insufficient levels of the chemical dopamine. Without dopamine people cannot perform many of their normal daily activities at an expected speed – their movements become slower and it takes longer to perform any task.

According to Parkinson's Australia the disease affects approximately one in three hundred people. Most people who get Parkinson's disease are in the age group of fifty or over. However young people are also affected, with one in twenty people living with Parkinson's disease under the age of forty. One hundred thousand Australians are currently living with Parkinson's disease.

Scientists and researchers have not yet been able to find a cure Parkinson's or slow down its progression, although this is an area of extensive research.

Each case of Parkinson's disease is unique, with everyone exhibiting varying symptoms. For example, not all people get tremors and for some, rigidity is the key symptom. Parkinson's Australia lists symptoms as:

- tremor, or trembling in hands, arms, legs, jaw, and face
- rigidity, or stiffness of limbs and trunk
- bradykinesia, or slowness of movement
- postural instability or impaired balance and coordination.

Parkinson's Australia notes that full-blown Parkinson's disease can be crippling or disabling. There are many tools which can lead to better quality of life for those with Parkinson's disease, and your local pharmacy can help.

With modern medicine, symptoms can be kept under control. The main aim of medicinal therapies is to increase the level of dopamine. As Parkinson's affects each person differently it is important to individually tailor medicine regimens accordingly. As the disease progresses, and dopamine production is reduced, it is quite common for people to require higher doses of medicine and therefore experience side effects. The objective is to obtain maximum mobility with minimal side effects.

Your local pharmacy is your health destination. Clearly, one of the key aspects to managing Parkinson's disease is medicine management. Medicine must be taken at the correct time to allow for absorption time and the attainment of therapeutic levels. Factors such as diet also need to be considered when taking medicine. Pharmacists are medicines experts and can assist you to gain the maximum benefit from the medicine, while keeping side effects to a minimum. Your pharmacist can help with advice and counselling – discussing what the medicine is for, what benefits should be expected, possible side effects and their management, drug interactions and how to keep an accurate record so information can be given to the doctor at each visit.

Pharmacies also offer professional services which can help people living with Parkinson's disease maintain their independence. For example, home delivery and medicine management services such as dose administration aids (DAAs). Your local pharmacy can also be a point of contact to avoid social isolation and depression – hallmarks of living with Parkinson's disease. Visit your local pharmacy on World Parkinson's Day and find out how they can help.

Pharmacies around Australia providing the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia's Self Care health information have a range of Fact Cards to help improve your overall health including *Preventing falls and Depression*. You can get more detailed information on managing the costs of medicine from the Self Care Fact Card titled *Help with medicine costs*.

For the nearest Self Care pharmacy location phone the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia on 1300 369 772, or go to www.psa.org.au 'Supporting practice' then 'Self Care', and then 'Find a Self Care pharmacy'.

Advice about Parkinson's disease is available through Parkinson's Australia (www.parkinsons.org.au).