



Communication and Parkinson's Disease

DEFINITION

Parkinson's Disease is a type of movement disorder that can affect the ability to perform common, daily activities. It is a chronic and progressive disease, meaning that the symptoms become worse over time. It is characterized by its most common motor symptoms—tremors (a form of rhythmic shaking), stiffness or rigidity of the muscles, and slowness of movement (called bradykinesia)—but also manifests in non-motor symptoms including sleep problems, constipation, anxiety, depression, and fatigue, among others.

Source: Apdaparkinson.org



HOW IT MAY IMPACT COMMUNICATION

- May have difficulty finding their words
- Speech may be unsteady and flat, breathy, deeper than before, or hoarse
- May not have typical nonverbal communication skills because of the disease affecting how they move their body
- Tremors, lack of coordination, muscle stiffness, etc. may affect handwriting and sign language usage
- May not recognize other's nonverbal expressions
- Feelings of embarrassment, anxiety, or depression may lead to social withdrawal
- May find it difficult to communicate while doing another task, such as walking



STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT COMMUNICATION

- Pencil grips or weighted pencils may help writing skills
- Face-to-face communication is most effective
- Be patient – give the person plenty of time to process and communicate
- Reduce stimuli in the environment
- Avoid more than one person speaking at a time and speaking above other noises
- Avoid irony, sarcasm, metaphors, figures of speech, and complex syntax
- Express and label emotions rather than relying on nonverbal cues
- Be willing to listen and help them to feel comfortable communicating
- Ask for repetition if you don't understand
- Using a video chat may be more effective than phone communication
- Share a little information at a time



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THE KEY to achieving effective communication with a person who has Parkinson's Disease is for the listener to intentionally engage in the process and accept the responsibility for it. How an individual is impacted by Parkinson's will vary and communication access depends on individual needs, looking differently for each person.



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