



Hospice of the Twin Cities

Hospice Insights

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“I know God won’t give me anything I can’t handle. I just wish He didn’t trust me so much.”
~ Mother Teresa ~

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Parkinson’s Disease

Parkinson’s Disease is a disease we have all become familiar with because of the publicity Michael J. Fox has received with his diagnosis of the disease.

Parkinson’s develops gradually, usually in older adults, even though there are exceptions like Michael J. Fox. Its most noted sign is tremors, which can be barely noticeable and only in one hand in the early stages of the disease. Other signs are a slowing or freezing of movement; a face showing little or no expression; arms which do not swing when the individual walks; and soft and/or mumbling speech. Symptoms appear to get worse as the disease progresses, even though there are many different types of medications to treat it.¹

Symptoms of Parkinson’s Disease:

Parkinson’s is not always easy to diagnose in the early stages, because the signs can be very subtle and may be unnoticed. The symptoms usually begin on one side of the body and as the disease progresses they remain worse on that side.¹

- **Tremor**
A tremor often begins in a hand. Another common tremor is known as pill-rolling, characterized by the individual rubbing their thumb and forefinger back and forth. It is also important to know not everyone with Parkinson’s has a tremor.¹
- **Bradykinesia**
Bradykinesia is slowed motion. As the disease progresses over time, it may affect the individuals

ability to make voluntary movements.¹

- **Rigid Muscles**
Muscles may become stiff in the neck and limbs, limiting movements, and has the ability to cause pain.¹
- **Impaired Posture and Balance**
Stooped posture and imbalance are common.¹
- **Loss of Automatic Movements**
There are many involuntary movements that can be lessened, or lost, with this disease. Some of them are smiling, swinging of the arms when walking, blinking, a fixed stare, or lack of expression when speaking.¹
- **Speech Changes**
Speech may be affected with Parkinson’s, as well. Some may speak softly, rapidly, slurring words, repeating, hesitating before speaking, or speaking in a monotone voice.¹
- **Dementia**
As time goes on some people develop memory problems. They may be helped by Alzheimer’s drugs.¹

If an individual experiences any of the above signs or symptoms they should see their doctor immediately.

Causes of Parkinson’s Disease

Research shows that a lack of the chemical messenger, dopamine, may cause many of the symptoms of Parkinson’s. It happens when dopamine producing brain cells die or become impaired. Some researchers think genetic mutations or environmental toxins may cause Parkinson’s.¹

Basic End-Stage Indicators:

- 1. Overall physical decline,**
- 2. Life-limiting condition,**
- 3. Clinical progression of the disease as evidenced by:**
 - A. Multiple ER visits;
 - B. Inpatient hospitalizations
 - C. Serial physician assessment;
 - D. Laboratory studies;
 - E. Radiologic or other studies.
- 4. Impaired nutritional status**
 - A. Decrease in appetite; increase in weight loss;
 - B. Serum albumin < 2.5mg/dl (not to be used in isolation)
- 5. Multiple co-morbidities;**
- 6. Decline in functional status (ADLs).**

Specific Guidelines for determining Prognosis: End-stage Neurological Disease

- **The patient should meet the following criteria:**
 - Patient is chair or bed-bound.
 - Patient has no ventilatory support.
 - Karnofsky score \leq 5. (See Appendix A)
 - ADL score of \leq 8. (See Appendix B)
 - Descriptive score \leq 21. (See Appendix A)

Parkinson's Disease cont.

There are several risk factors for this disease:

- Age - Parkinson's usually strikes middle age or older people.
- Heredity - If a close relative has Parkinson's it increases your chance of getting the disease, even though the risk is still less than 5%.
- Gender - Men are most likely to get Parkinson's.
- Exposure to toxins - Exposure, over time, to herbicides and pesticides slightly increases your risk for Parkinson's.¹

The diagnosis of Parkinson's can be difficult as there are no definitive tests to diagnose this disease. Even if an individual is not diagnosed with Parkinson's, there are other diseases with many of these same symptoms, such as dementia with Lewy bodies, essential tremor, corticobasal degeneration, Parkinson's disease with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, multiple system atrophy, and progressive supranuclear palsy. These diseases would qualify as parkinsonian type diseases. There are many causes for parkinsonian symptoms including some antipsychotic medications (Thorazine, Haldol, Compazine, or Reglan); toxins (carbon monoxide, cyanide, or other toxins); head trauma (singular event or multiple events); and structural problems (strokes or hydrocephalus).¹

A diagnosis of Parkinson's occurs if an individual has at least two of the three cardinal Parkinson's symptoms (tremor, bradykinesia, and muscle rigidity); onset of symptoms on one side of the body; tremor more prevalent at rest; and a strong response to levodopa, a Parkinson's drug.¹

As with all chronic diseases, there are complications that are caused by the disease. In Parkinson's the most common complications are depression, sleep problems, difficulty chewing and swallowing, urinary problems, constipation, and sexual dysfunction. Even the medications used for Parkinson's can cause many complications including involuntary twitching or jerking movements of the arms and legs, hallucinations, sleepiness, and a drop in blood pressure while standing.¹

Signs and symptoms of the disease can have dramatic improvement from treatment; however, over time the results can diminish or be very inconsistent. Some medications used for treatment of Parkinson's are levodopa, dopamine agonists, MAO B inhibitors, catechol O-methyltransferase inhibitors, anticholinergics, and anti-virals. Other treatments may include physical therapy, surgery (deep brain stimulation), healthy nutrition, walking with care, avoiding falls, physical exercise, coenzyme Q10, Massage, Tai chi, and Yoga.¹

For more information or support in this community, Struthers Parkinson's Center is an expert resource (952-993-5495).

References:

Parkinson's disease; <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/parkinsons-disease/DS00295>



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Mission Statement

Hospice of the Twin Cities' mission is to enhance the quality of the lives of our patients and their families by providing respectful care based on maintaining dignity, alleviating physical, psychosocial, and spiritual suffering, advocating for fundamental rights, and affirming the sacred value of life.