

The Effects of Parkinson's and Steps to Ensure the Best Quality of Care

When a loved one has Parkinson's disease, it's important to recognize the various stages. Caregiving and daily living aids help patients continue to function.

By Emma R. Dickison

While celebrities, including Michael J. Fox and Muhammad Ali, have helped to increase name recognition of Parkinson's disease, there remains a general lack of understanding about this neurological disorder. In honor of April being National Parkinson's Awareness Month, the focus of this article is to shed light on this chronic and progressive disease.



Parkinson's is a disorder of the central nervous system affecting the nerve cells in the brain that control movement. According to the American Parkinson Disease Association, nearly 1.5 million people are living with Parkinson's, and eMedTV estimates that 50,000 new cases are diagnosed each year.

As the prevalence of Parkinson's continues to rise, it is important to raise awareness and educate families and their loved ones about Parkinson's symptoms and the care options available for those who have been diagnosed.

Understanding the various stages of Parkinson's is critical to ensuring those who are diagnosed are receiving proper care in a safe environment. The following is a list of stages one may go through and the Parkinson's symptoms associated with each one.

Stage 1

You may notice your loved one is having trouble completing day-to-day tasks that were once easy. Symptoms are mild and appear in the form of tremors or shaking of the limbs. It is also crucial to pay attention to your loved one's posture and facial expressions. Is your loved one slouching all the time now, when they used to have excellent posture?

Stage 2

At this point, symptoms will start affecting both sides of the body. Your loved one may start noticing pain in both arms and both legs. Are they having trouble walking?

Stage 3

Symptoms may become severe, and it is now critical to be aware of all physical movements. Pay close attention to your loved one's ability to walk and stand normally. If your loved one is experiencing discomfort walking or standing, start monitoring their pain level and speak to their doctor if it begins to escalate.

Stage 4

One of the most visible symptoms of Stage 4 is bradykinesia, or slow movement and decreased fine motor skills. Though your loved ones tremors may be diminishing, this is typically when they will begin to require in-home care.

Stage 5

The final stage of Parkinson's is typically the most severe. Physical movements are nearly impossible and your loved one may no longer be able to care for him or herself.

If you have additional questions or concerns about the symptoms of Parkinson's, it is important to speak to a healthcare professional.

Creating a Safe Home Environment

As the Parkinson's symptoms worsen, your loved one's care needs will increase. Creating a safe home environment is one of the most important first steps you can take to help your loved one adjust to this lifestyle.



There are many simple things you can do throughout the house to create a safe home environment. In the bathroom, consider installing an elevated toilet seat and a bath bench or shower stool, which require less effort to get up and down. Placing a rubber mat or non-skid decals can help prevent slipping on wet surfaces.

In the kitchen, consider installing longer cabinet handles rather than knobs to assist your loved one with opening the doors. A single-handle faucet is easier to control, and a reacher can help retrieve items on high shelves.

Adjustments in the living room can also help your loved one tremendously. Examine the furniture to make sure it is secure and sturdy. Older adults require about two times more lighting than younger adults, so make sure there is adequate lighting to help minimize eye strain. Finally, ensure all wires and extension cords are clear of the individual's walking path.



By taking the time to learn more about Parkinson's and its effects, you can help ensure your loved one is comfortable and receiving the best quality care.