



Parkinson's Disease: *It's More Than Tremors*

While celebrities, including Muhammad Ali, Michael J. Fox and Janet Reno have helped to increase name recognition of Parkinson's Disease, there remains a general lack of understanding about this neurological disorder in terms of functional aspects and caregiving considerations. "With an increasing number of our clients having Parkinson's, and with April being National Parkinson's Awareness Month, this edition of our newsletter is dedicated to helping people gain insight about this chronic and progressive illness," said Emma Dickison, president of Home Helpers.

Parkinson's is a disorder of the central nervous system (CNS) affecting the nerve cells in the brain that send signals to initiate and control movement. With Parkinson's, the progression of the disease varies by person and the symptoms can occur frequently or infrequently and may be severe or mild.

Did you know ...

- Parkinson's affects more than 1.5 million Americans?
- People with Parkinson's tend to be 60 and older?
- While the diagnosis can be devastating, Parkinson's is not life-threatening.
- With the progression of stages, Parkinson's leads to disability.

In addition to trembling which is often noticeable in the hands, arms, legs and face, other lesser known signs and symptoms of Parkinson's, many of which are more common in the later stages of the disease, may include:

- Stiffness or rigidity of muscles in the limbs and neck.
- Lack of usual arm swing when walking.
- Slowness of movement or freezing when attempting to move.
- Unsteadiness and impaired balance and coordination.
- Lack of natural facial expressions, blinking of the eyes and eye contact.
- Changes in speech including monotone and mumbling, and trouble swallowing.
- Stooped posture that may appear similar to Osteoporosis.

When Parkinson's impacts a person, in addition to emotional support, care needs increase over time as do safety concerns. Initially, people may feel conspicuous and self-conscious in public because they cannot control tremors. In addition, fine motor skills associated with daily living activities, including eating, drinking, dressing, bathing and writing can present challenges and frustrations. As symptoms worsen over time, the need for caregiving assistance increases to address safety concerns and provide support with independent living and personal care activities.

As with any life-changing illness, relationships with a spouse and adult children often become strained. "Whenever possible, we encourage families to discuss their preferences, values and limitations," Dickison added. "Many families would prefer to focus their time on the relationship and offering emotional support and have us provide assistance with the day-to-day living activities. At Home Helpers, we are committed to helping make life easier for our clients and their families by helping them live life to the fullest."

The Stages of Parkinson's Disease

The five stages of Parkinson's Disease can help people have an idea of what to expect over time. For more information, visit www.parkinson.org/Page.aspx?pid=367. Please note, the signs, symptoms, care needs and duration of each stage can vary from person to person.

Stage 1: Signs and symptoms include:

- Typically mild symptoms
- Shaking in one hands or limb often visible.
- Slight changes in balance, posture and expressions.

Living and considerations: Routine activities tend to take additional time and effort.

Stage 2: Signs and symptoms include:

- Tremors affect limbs hands, arms and legs on both sides.
- Challenges maintaining balance when standing/walking.

Living and considerations: Routine tasks often take assistance to complete.

Stage 3: Signs and symptoms include:

- Symptoms tend to increase and become intense.
- Posture and movement increasingly stiff and slow.

Living and considerations: Daily living activities and personal care requires assistance.

Stage 4: Signs and symptoms include:

- All symptoms tend to be severe.

Living and considerations: Ongoing assistance is needed. Unsafe to live alone.

Stage 5: Signs and symptoms include:

- Likely unable to stand or walk.
- Speech and swallowing may be severely impaired.

Living and considerations: Constant nursing care is needed.

Additional Resources

The following websites offer helpful and insightful information. Joining a local support group or an online forum or blog may also be worth exploring.

American Parkinson Disease Association - <http://www.apdaparkinson.org>

National Institute of Health – <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/parkinsonsdisease.html> & http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/parkinsons_disease/parkinsons_disease.htm

National Parkinson's Foundation - <http://www.parkinson.org>

Parkinson's Disease Foundation - <http://www.pdf.org>

The Michael J. Fox Foundation - <http://www.michaeljfox.org>

HOME HELPERS – *Making Life Easier* Home Helpers offers quality non-medical and personal care* and companionship services similar to the care and support often provided by family members. Our flexible care plans are tailored to fit our clients' specific needs and budgets. To learn more about Home Helpers, call (800) 216-4196, ext. 105, or visit us online at www.HomeHelpers.CC (as in **Compassionate Caregivers**).

Compassionate Care is a bi-monthly newsletter produced by Home Helpers. We hope you found this edition to be informative and helpful.

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