

# Chew, it's good for you

## PARKINSON'S RESEARCH

By JOHN MINER, THE LONDON FREE PRESS  
Last Updated: 23rd October 2009, 9:37am



London researchers have found the simple act of chewing gum helps people with Parkinson's swallow, reducing a major problem for those with the debilitating disease.

Researchers believe repeated chewing leaves a lingering memory in the brain that can help patients cope a bit better.

"It was very helpful in terms of improving drooling and swallowing," Dr. Mandar Jog, London Health Sciences Centre neurologist and director of the Movement Disorders Centre, said yesterday.

Parkinson's, which afflicts more than 100,000 Canadians, is a neuro-degenerative disease that typically causes tremors, impairs balance and makes muscles go rigid.

There is no known cure.

In those who have the disease, the natural tendency to regularly swallow slows -- often causing a build up of saliva in their mouth. The resulting drooling can make it difficult to socialize with others and the problem can lead to pneumonia.

Jog said more than 75% of Parkinson's patients will have difficulty swallowing as the disease progresses.

Drugs haven't been found effective in treating the problem.

The London researchers, including Jog and speech pathologists Angie South and Stephanie Somers, worked with 20 Parkinson patients who were asked to chew gum for a half hour before every meal.

The results were dramatic.

"We found in the preliminary data that there is some leftover memory of swallowing if they have been chewing for awhile. We want to take advantage of that to get them to improve their swallowing for maybe half an hour, long enough for them to have their meal," Jog said.

With a \$31,500 grant from the Parkinson Society of Canada, the researchers plan to extend their study to 40 patients.

"We are going to have them chew gum on their own time at home, at least three hours a day," said Jog.

After a week, the patients will be tested at the clinic to see if there's been an improvement in the bio-mechanics of swallowing, he said.

"We want to see if the efficiency of swallowing has improved in these people as well."