

Chewing gum helps patients

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

Researchers suspect the 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, a neurologist at London Health Sciences Centre 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.