



What is Parkinson's Disease? Information for teens with a parent who has Parkinson's Disease

Dr. James Parkinson, a London doctor, first described Parkinson's in 1817. Parkinson's disease (PD) is a slowly progressive disorder that can affect a person's physical movements and other functions within the body that are not visible from the outside.

The area of the brain affected is the substantia nigra, meaning black substance. A neurotransmitter, or messenger, called dopamine is made in this part of the brain. Dopamine allows nerve impulses to travel from one nerve cell to another, sending messages to the muscles. These messages control movement. When 50% or more of the dopamine-producing cells are lost, symptoms (the things that show a doctor that it is PD) begin to appear.

Research is being done all over the world to learn more about what causes PD and to find a cure for the disease. As of now, most scientists agree that the cause includes a combination of genetics and environmental factors. A lot of progress has been made towards improving medical treatment. PD is not contagious and only a very, very small number of children with a parent with PD will get it themselves later on in life.

There are approximately 100,000 Canadians living with PD and as many as 20% may be under the age of 50 when they find out they have the disease.

Symptoms and how they are treated

PD can look different in people and symptoms can show up slowly over time. Some of the common symptoms include:

- Tremor (shaking of a hand or arm)
- Rigidity (stiffness in the muscles that makes it difficult to move)
- Bradykinesia (slowness of movement) and balance
- Quieter voice
- Smaller handwriting
- Feeling tired
- Body pains
- Depression and anxiety
- Difficulty thinking clearly

Treatment for PD is always improving and there are doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, social workers and speech therapists available to help people with PD enjoy a happy, active life.

As well, many different kinds of medications can be used to help with PD symptoms. Sometimes these medications have side effects that can make people feel unwell with an upset stomach, dizziness, or sleepiness. But most of these side effects can be improved with finding the right recipe of medications.

How could this affect you?

Life has changed and it is normal to feel angry, sad, resentful, frustrated and guilty. There may be more stress in your home due to changes in your parent's symptoms, future plans and/or finances. Talk with your parents about how you feel and tell them about your concerns.

Together, solutions can be worked on. Remember, none of this is your fault.

You may have new tasks or responsibilities in the house that you would not have otherwise had to do. You may feel you have to do these chores but you do not have to like it.

The things you can do with your parent may change over time and it is important to look at different ways to stay connected. Try creating new activities that you can do together. While your parent will always be your parent, PD might mean that you have to change what you expect of your parent and your family life.

What can help you, and what can you do?

- Consider having regular family meetings so you can share with your parents how this is affecting you and work together to find solutions.
- Talk with someone you feel a connection with (a friend, relative, teacher, counselor, coach or neighbour). Talking about your concerns or worries might help you feel better.
- Get involved. Sometimes we feel better when we take action to improve a situation. Try organizing a fundraiser to support PD research, participate in your community's SuperWalk or raise awareness of PD at your school/church/community centre.
- Consider making a connection with others your age who may be experiencing similar issues - you are not the only one with a parent with PD.
- Stay involved in exercise and other interests. You may even want to consider yoga and meditation. Staying active will help you deal with your feelings and manage stress. Be sure to eat well, get lots of rest and continue to have fun!

If you want more information, consider the following websites rather than googling "Parkinson's Disease":

www.parkinsoncno.ca

www.parkinson.ca

www.parkinson.org

It also might be a good idea to look at the websites with someone who can help you understand the information, someone like your parent/relative/adult friend, a teacher, counselor or coach.

Other contacts you may find helpful:

Parkinson's Society Central & Northern Ontario: 1-800-565-3000

Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868

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