

Living Alone with Parkinson's disease

Coping effectively with Parkinson's disease (PD) can be challenging for anyone, even those living with close, supportive family or friends. While some people prefer to live alone and thrive on the independence, a person with Parkinson's living alone may face additional worries and challenges. Along with the physical and mental changes brought about by normal aging, PD can make it harder for a person to remain socially connected. It can also create greater safety concerns in the home. Despite these challenges, many people living alone with PD do manage quite well.

Staying Connected

One of the most important strategies for successfully living alone with PD is to maintain social connections. Isolating yourself can lead to depression and worsening of your symptoms so it is important to find ways to interact with other people in a way that works best for you. A supportive network of friends and family is usually viewed as ideal but for many people, and for a variety of reasons, this is not always available. Consider using the internet as a way of staying connected through email, Skype, social media and on-line forums. Attending a support group meeting can be another good way of meeting other people in similar situations. In short, push yourself a bit to maintain an effective and helpful social network.

Home Safety

People with PD are at greater risk of falling so it is crucial to ensure that your home is safe for you. Making your house a safer place to be can help you feel more comfortable and can decrease some concerns that you, and those who care about you, may have.

Here are some suggestions for improving home safety and avoiding falls:

- Install brighter lighting everywhere, inside and out.
- Add bed rails and install grab rails to your stairs, bath or shower.
- Rearrange furniture so you have clear pathways through your living space.
- Remove all rugs or mats that are not affixed *firmly* to the floor – they are tripping hazards for everyone whether you have PD or not.
- Secure or eliminate loose wires or cords to avoid tripping on them.
- Consider installing an alarm system that connects to 911 or other emergency responders.

Time to Get Organized

Another important aspect to living well on your own is to be organized. The tasks of daily life like cooking, laundry and even personal care can be tiresome and they may become overwhelming if you get behind. A good way of keeping yourself organized is to create a "to do" list and a detailed schedule as a constant reminder. You might also consider home delivery services for your groceries and at some point you may want to

look into a meal delivery service. Ask your pharmacist about home delivery and ask about having your medications bubble wrapped (also known as 'blister packs').

In addition to these day-to-day activities, you may want to consider speaking to a financial planner about your future income and resources. You may also want to consult with a lawyer about appointing a Power of Attorney for Property and Personal Care, to give you peace of mind that someone will be able to act on your behalf, should an emergency arise. Power of Attorney kits are also available online through the Ministry of the Attorney General www.attorneygeneral.jus.gov.on.ca

Managing Your Medication

Managing PD medications can be difficult with or without a caregiver. Here are a few tips for easier medication management:

- Create a chart of all your medications with detailed information including the name and type of medication, dosages and times to be taken.
- Post your chart on the door of your refrigerator so it is easy for you to use and for other people to locate if necessary.
- Keep a Medication Card up-to-date with current medication information and always carry it with you.
- Keep a medication and symptom diary and take it with you to medical appointments. Write down changes in symptoms, how closely you followed your medication schedule, what you ate with your medications and anything new you may be concerned about.
- Consider purchasing a pill timer.
- See the *Get it on Time!* section of our website for information on the importance of precise timing of your medications, and helpful resources.

Ontario's Community Care Access Centres (CCACs)

If living alone is becoming too difficult for you, but you would like to remain independent, there are options for you. Community Care Access Centres (CCACs) are local agencies that provide information about care options in your area. They help people to live independently at home, apply for admission to day programs, supportive housing or assisted living programs. CCACs also provide information about local community support service agencies and can link people to these agencies to arrange services. The first step in finding out what your home support options might be is to arrange for an in-home safety and individual needs assessment. Anyone may contact CCAC: the Ontario-wide number is 310-2222 (no area code needed).

Technology

Telephones can be lifesavers and it is recommended that you have a cordless phone to carry with you around your home and a cell phone for use outside of your home. Look into phones with special features such as a large key pad and enhanced audio. Be sure your family, friends and support workers have your phone numbers and consider adding emergency contact numbers to your home's speed dial function.

Ask for Help When You Need it

Even if you find it hard to do so, ask for help when you need it. Many people are happy to help when they understand what is needed. Make your request specific (Could we

have coffee together more than once a month?); practical (Could you drive me to an appointment?); and provide as much notice as possible (My appointment is at the end of next week. Can you drive me there?) You may be pleasantly surprised by some of the responses!

Based on a fact sheet developed by Parkinson Society BC: reprinted with permission.

