

Management of Saliva and Drooling

Excessive saliva and drooling affects up to 50% of people with Parkinson's (PD). Drooling can be embarrassing and can limit social interactions for the person with PD. It can also be an important symptom of swallowing difficulty, which can increase the risk of choking on saliva.

People with Parkinson's disease do not swallow automatically due to rigidity and impaired mobility of the muscles of the palate, throat and esophagus. Saliva pools in the mouth and can potentially become a hazard since swallowing into the lungs carries the risk of pneumonia. If you have poor posture, saliva collects in the front of the mouth, resulting in drooling.

Cause and symptoms

Decreased control of saliva is most often caused by changes in the ability to swallow, rather than from producing too much saliva. A common cause of drooling for people with PD is the weakening and/or loss of motor control of the muscles involved in swallowing.

You may experience one or more of the following symptoms:

- Decreased ability to keep your mouth closed at rest, known as the “open mouth posture”
- Difficulty keeping lips closed
- Lack of awareness of the saliva in your mouth
- Wetness at the sides of your mouth
- A wet sounding voice
- Drooling with posture changes
- Coughing and/or choking

Evaluation and treatment

Speak with your physician about all symptoms that may not be related to PD. If you are experiencing drooling or choking on your saliva, you may require a swallowing evaluation by a Speech Language Pathologist. You may also need a head and neck evaluation by an Ear, Nose and Throat specialist.

There are a variety of treatments available for saliva management including the following:

- Therapy with a swallowing specialist (Speech Language Pathologist)
- Oral medication
- Botulinum toxin (Botox) injection

Your health care team can help you decide what the best treatment options are for you, based on the severity of your symptoms.

Tips for managing drooling

- Make a conscious effort to:
 - Keep your lips closed
 - Swallow regularly
 - Swallow frequently throughout the day and keep your head and chin upright
- Suck on a hard candy or chew gum to stimulate swallowing and to remind you to swallow
- Carry a handkerchief to wipe your mouth

See also Parkinson Canada's *Swallowing Issues* resource.

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