

I'm afraid to take medication for my Parkinson's symptoms.

It's normal to feel apprehension. There is good treatment for Parkinson's and its symptoms however you may have some concerns about taking medication. Ask questions and discuss your fears and concerns with your doctor and health care team – they can help you make informed decisions about your treatment.

What else can I do?

- Medication can be taken before or after meals according to your doctor's instructions.
- Keep an accurate list of all the medications you take (including over-the-counter products and herbal remedies), the exact formulation you take, the dose and the timing. Make sure your health care team has a copy.
- Your pharmacist is an important part of your team. Make sure you use the same pharmacy outlet all the time and that it has a record of all your medication. Your pharmacist can ensure over-the-counter medication and vitamin supplements do not adversely interact with your prescription drugs.
- Medication can often be very expensive. Some provincial governments have programs to assist patients with the cost of medication. Ask your pharmacist, doctor or Parkinson Society Canada about programs available in your province.



Helpful tips to reduce side effects

- take each dose with a full glass of water to aid absorption
- use some sort of system to remind you to take your medication on time and avoid "double-dosing"
- do not break, crush or chew controlled-release tablets unless instructed to by your doctor
- if you experience nausea with a new medication, try taking it after meals or with non-protein food (salty or slightly sweet snacks such as pretzels, crackers, fruit). Herbal remedies such as ginger or chamomile tea may help. Typically these symptoms are short-lived but if they are severe or persistent contact your doctor.

Important reminder: If you are going to have surgery, especially one requiring a general anesthetic, talk to your surgeon/anesthetist. He/she may want to discuss anesthesia, pain relief and your drug treatment with your doctor/neurologist. Certain pain relief drugs can interact with Parkinson's drugs.



Parkinson Society Canada is a national organization with regional partners from coast to coast. We share a vision to ease the burden and find a cure through advocacy, education, research and support services to improve quality of life for all those affected by Parkinson's.

Call your local Parkinson office for information, programs and services in your area, or to make a donation.

One in a series of brochures produced by

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Ease the Burden; Find a Cure

 **Parkinson Society Canada**
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Parkinson's: What you need to know about the medication you take

Ease the Burden; Find a Cure



Since you've been diagnosed with Parkinson's, you've most likely discovered your progress and symptoms are different from other people with Parkinson's. You are unique – which means the treatment you receive will be geared to your specific needs.

At some point, you will start taking medication to lessen the symptoms. This will probably happen when you feel your normal daily activities are affected.

This brochure will help you understand what kinds of medication are available, their potential side effects, and the importance of working closely with your doctor to find the right balance between the drugs' benefits and side effects.

When should I start taking medication?

The timing will differ from person to person. It depends on a variety of factors: your age, the side involved (dominant or non-dominant), the nature of the symptoms, your lifestyle, if you're working or retired, what kind of leisure activities you enjoy. Only you, in consultation with your doctor, can make the decision on when to start.

What do I need to know?

The purpose of drug therapy is to relieve symptoms and improve your quality of life. Drugs will not stop the progression of the disease. Drugs will help you function better but they are not perfect and may cause side effects. You may have to take your medications several times a day. These drugs work on the brain's complex chemistry – use them only as prescribed and never alter your dosages without first consulting with your doctor.



Anti-Parkinson Medication

Since many of the motor symptoms of Parkinson's are the result of a lack of dopamine, the majority of drugs used to treat Parkinson's are aimed at temporarily replenishing or imitating dopamine. This is only a guide – your doctor and pharmacist have more detailed information on the effectiveness and potential side effects of all available medication.

1) Levodopa (levodopa/benserazide, Prolopa[®], levodopa/carbidopa, Sinemet[®], Sinemet[®]CR)

- converted into dopamine in the brain and stored in nerve cells to replace depleted dopamine ... always combined with another drug, carbidopa or benserazide, which allows more levodopa to get to the brain and reduces its side effects
- helps to alleviate muscle rigidity, improve speed and coordination of movement
- initial side effects may include nausea, dizziness, loss of appetite ... levodopa is usually started slowly to prevent these problems
- as the disease progresses, larger doses will likely be necessary ... over years, levodopa may be associated with "response fluctuations" in some patients. Sometimes the medication may work well and other times it may not be effective
- Other side effects may develop in some patients and may include dyskinesia (involuntary movements) and hallucinations

2) Dopamine Agonists (bromocriptine, Parlodel[®], pergolide, Permax[®], pramapexole, Mirapex[®], ropinirole, ReQuip[®])

- work directly on certain targets in the brain to imitate dopamine ... can be used as an initial treatment or with levodopa in more advanced stages
- side effects are similar to levodopa but nausea and hallucinations are more common
- other side effects may include ankle swelling and daytime drowsiness

3) Amantadine (Symmetrel[®])

- enhances dopamine release and blocks a specific receptor for a chemical called glutamate
- has been used to treat early symptoms and can reduce the severity of dyskinesia and improve wearing off
- side effects may include swelling of feet, hallucinations, urinary retention, red or purple skin blotches

4) COMT Inhibitors (entacapone, Comtan[®])

- block a key enzyme responsible for breaking down levodopa before it reaches the brain ... can improve duration of response to levodopa
- side effects can include dyskinesia, diarrhea and change in urine colour

5) Monoamine-Oxidase-B Inhibitors (MAO-B) (selegiline, Eldepryl[®])

- enhance the effect of dopamine by

preventing its breakdown

- side effects can be similar to levodopa including dyskinesia, hallucinations, nausea, or a stimulant effect causing anxiety or insomnia
- ### 6) Anticholinergic Drugs (Apo[®]-trihex, benztropine, Cogentin[®], trihexyphenidyl, Artane[®])
- oldest type of medication – relieve early symptoms by correcting the imbalance between dopamine and acetylcholine (a neurotransmitter in the brain) ... may help tremor in some people



How can I manage my drug treatment?

Medication management is the most important part of controlling Parkinson symptoms. Your doctor will provide guidelines on when medication should be taken.

You can help by keeping a record of medication effectiveness, times when it is not effective, as well as side effects. Finding the right treatment balance takes time so share any observations with your doctor. Ask your doctor how long after you begin taking the medication it will likely start to be effective. A plan should be put in place to have contact with your doctor to report the benefits or problems and review the next steps. If the medication prescribed has side effects, or is not effective at the dose administered, your doctor can suggest other options.