

Women with Parkinson's:

What we know and tips to advocate for your care

Parkinson's often looks different for women than it does for men. For many women, symptoms may appear differently than they do in men, and the path to diagnosis and treatment can be slower or more confusing. Knowing what sets women's experiences apart can help you recognize patterns, ask the right questions, and ensure your care reflects your individual needs.

Patterns in how women experience Parkinson's

Diagnosis and symptoms differ

Women often experience **different symptoms** than men at all stages in their Parkinson's journey. Compared to men, women often experience:

- More non-motor symptoms such as anxiety, depression, apathy, pain, and fatigue.
- Less rigidity, fewer cognitive changes, and fewer gut-related symptoms.

Women also experience **differences in diagnosis** and prognosis, including:

- Delayed or missed diagnosis, as symptoms may be overlooked, downplayed, or attributed to stress.
- Increased likelihood of other health conditions, including osteoporosis, arthritis, hip fractures, and depression.

Hormones and life stages

Hormonal changes over a woman's lifetime can affect how Parkinson's symptoms present and fluctuate.

- Many women notice worsening symptoms before their period and fluctuations in symptoms with their menstrual cycle.
- Some menopause symptoms such as sleep problems, fatigue, anxiety, and depression, can overlap with Parkinson's symptoms.
- Parkinson's symptoms may worsen before and after menopause due to shifting estrogen levels.
- Younger women with Parkinson's may face added challenges related to contraception, pregnancy, and childbirth.

Social and emotional realities

Women often face unique pressures that can shape their Parkinson's experience:

- **Caregiving roles:** Many women care for family members while managing their own symptoms. Balancing caregiving with work or other responsibilities can increase stress and, for some, worsen symptoms.
- **Difficulty seeking help:** Some women may find it hard to ask for help, particularly if they have long identified as care givers or worry about being a burden on their family.
- **Emotional and mental health:** Anxiety and depression are more common in women with Parkinson's.
- **Social stigma:** Women with Parkinson's often describe changes to their self-image and say the condition can interfere with social interactions.

What we can do

- **Track your symptoms and medications.** Keep notes on movement, mood, sleep, fatigue, pain, medication timing, and how you feel before and after doses, including any changes around your menstrual cycle or menopause.
- **Build a team around you that listens to and respects your experience.** Seek emotional support through counselling, peer groups, or women-specific programs. And consider ways to strengthen your care by preparing written concerns, asking for referrals (e.g., to a mental health professional or menopause specialist), and involving a care partner or allied health professional who can help amplify your voice.
- **Start conversations about hormones with your care team.** Hormonal changes aren't always discussed in Parkinson's care. Consider asking how menstrual cycles or menopause may be affecting your symptoms and whether treatment adjustments could help.
- **Join advocacy efforts** to increase research funding for women-specific research. Visit parkinson.ca/advocacy for tools to help you advocate effectively.

→ **Practice asking for and accepting help as part of your care, not as a sign of weakness.** Sharing specific examples of where support would help can make it easier for others to understand your needs and respond in practical ways.


“When my anxiety is worse, I avoid social functions at work because they feel overwhelming.”

A mental health professional can work with you to recognize the anxiety triggers early and help you develop a practice of specific relaxation techniques.

“When fatigue hits, I struggle to keep up with daily chores or caregiving responsibilities.”

This is an opportunity to accept support from family or friends, such as creating a shared weekly plan for tasks like meal preparation, laundry, or household clean-up.

→ **Participate in research** if you're interested and able – it strengthens the evidence base for women. Visit parkinson.ca/research to learn about participating in research studies.



Women's experiences with Parkinson's are distinct, and recognizing these differences is key to getting the care you deserve. Empowerment means actively learning – through research, webinars, trusted organizations, and conversations with other women living with Parkinson's, both locally and globally. By staying informed and speaking up about your needs, you can play an active role in shaping care that truly reflects your experiences.

Visit parkinson.ca/women to learn more and access helpful tools to help you feel more confident in your care.



Parkinson Canada

You don't have to manage Parkinson's alone. Our Support & Information team can connect you to support groups, community resources, educational materials, and national programs.

Email support@parkinson.ca or
call 1-888-664-1974

Thank you to the women with Parkinson's who reviewed and helped shape this resource.