



Best Doctors® REPORT

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A Word from Best Doctors

The large increase of baby boomers entering their senior years will mean that diseases that primarily affect the elderly will begin to rise dramatically in the near future.



One of these diseases comes into the spotlight in April, which has been designated as Parkinson's Awareness Month. **Nearly 100,000 Canadians suffer from Parkinson's, and 85% of those diagnosed are over the age of 65.** That age group is predicted to rise over the next 30 years from 11.6% to 23.6% of the population¹, meaning the disease is set to become even more prevalent.

More Canadians living with Parkinson's will not only mean difficulties for those living with the disease as it progressively robs them of their physical and cognitive abilities – it also

means a greater toll on our health care system and on family members. Those affected by Parkinson's tend to experience significant disability 10 to 15 years after their initial diagnosis, and are forced to increasingly rely on help from caregivers.

While there is no cure for Parkinson's, treatments are available to help control symptoms and improve the quality of life for those living with the disease. Parkinson's research has also progressed significantly over the past several years, and scientists continue to try and work towards a cure.

¹ Parkinson Society Canada, http://www.parkinson.ca/atf/cf/%7B9ebd08a9-7886-4b2d-a1c4-a131e7096bf8%7D/PARKINSONSDISEASE_EN.PDF

What is Parkinson's disease?

Parkinson's is a progressive neurodegenerative brain disorder resulting from the loss of cells in the brain that produce dopamine, a chemical that controls the body's movements. Dopamine carries signals between nerves in the brain and helps people have smooth, coordinated muscle movements. When the cells that normally produce dopamine are damaged and do not produce enough of the chemical, the motor symptoms of Parkinson's appear.

As dopamine decreases, tremors may develop, muscle movements become slower and more rigid, and a person's reflexes become impaired, contributing to a loss of balance. The symptoms are not only physical, they are also cognitive, and include depression and anxiety as well as limitations with problem-solving, thinking and memory.

A diagnosis often takes time and symptoms can take years to develop. As a chronic, progressive disorder, Parkinson's tends to worsen over time. The cause of the disease is unknown.



Early Warning Signs

Parkinson's disease can be hard to diagnose. Here are a few early warning signs that can help you tell if you or a loved one may have the disease:

- Tremors or shaking
- Problems with handwriting
- Trouble moving or walking
- Soft speech
- Stooped posture



Other signs of Parkinson's disease include feeling dizzy, constipation, difficulty sleeping or a loss of smell.

*Source: National Parkinson Foundation

Living with Parkinson's

While a diagnosis of Parkinson's is life changing for you or a loved one, you can take comfort in knowing there are things that can be done to maintain a good quality of life. Here are some things to consider:

Proper nutrition. We all know it's important to eat a well-balanced diet, but this is especially true for people living with Parkinson's disease. Eating healthfully can help with symptoms such as constipation and can also help in maintaining bone health.

Regular exercise. Staying active helps keep joints supple while also helping with posture, flexibility and muscle strength. Exercise can be built into your daily routine by incorporating activities such as walking, swimming or gardening.

Mental health. According to research, anxiety and depression are more common with Parkinson's than with other chronic diseases². It's especially important for those with Parkinson's to be screened regularly for depression and to be aware of any changes in their mood—any feelings of anxiety or depression should be discussed with a doctor.

Drug therapy. This is the main form of treatment for Parkinson's. Drug therapy can help relieve symptoms, making it easier to function on a daily basis, although the drugs may also have side effects. Surgical treatment is also an option for some Parkinson's patients.

Getting help. A support group may help by connecting a person suffering from Parkinson's with others who are undergoing a similar experience, while also providing an opportunity to get helpful information and advice on how to manage life with the disease. There are also support groups for caregivers. Contact Parkinson Society Canada to find out what's available in your community.

² National Parkinson Foundation (<http://www.parkinson.org/Parkinson-s-Disease/Living-Well/Depression>).

How Best Doctors Can Help

There isn't one way to identify Parkinson's, making it somewhat more difficult to arrive at a firm diagnosis. Various symptoms are assessed and diagnostic tests are used in combination.

According to Statistics Canada, the average age at which people first experience Parkinson's symptoms is 64.4 years, and a diagnosis of Parkinson's will arrive 1.9 years later. The period between onset of symptoms and diagnosis is much greater in younger people—an average of nearly seven years.

The difficulty of diagnosing the disease is further complicated by the fact that there are various "Parkinsonism" syndromes that mimic the symptoms of Parkinson's.

FACTS:

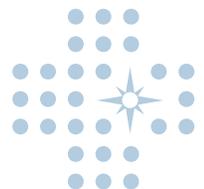
- About 5,500 new cases of Parkinson's disease are diagnosed each year in Canada.
- The number of Canadians over 40 living with Parkinson's disease will increase by 65 per cent, from 99,000 in 2016 to 163,700 by 2031.
- The number of Canadians over 65 living with Parkinson's disease will more than double to 148,800 by 2031.
- Brain disease and disorders like Parkinson's disease are expected to surpass cancer and heart disease as the leading cause of death and disability for Canadians by 2040.
- Parkinson's disease is the second most common neurodegenerative disorder after Alzheimer's disease.

Sources:
1. Parkinson Society Canada
2. Parkinson Society British Columbia
3. Statistics Canada (<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-003-x/2014011/article/14112-eng.htm>)

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If a doctor suspects that you or a loved one has Parkinson's disease or if you've received a Parkinson's diagnosis and you want a second opinion, keep in mind that Best Doctors is here to help become your own health care advocate. Best Doctors can also be an invaluable resource if you simply want more information on Parkinson's disease following a diagnosis or have health concerns about yourself or a loved one reaching senior age.



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