



# Your guide to Parkinson's disease →



# Parkinson's disease

Parkinson's is a progressive neurological condition. It affects movement and occurs when nerve cells in the brain become damaged or die.

These nerve cells produce dopamine which is important for coordinating smooth and controlled movements. Symptoms will develop gradually over time.

Around 166,000 people live with Parkinson's in the UK. Parkinson's is on the rise.

In the UK today, someone is diagnosed every 20 minutes.

By 2050, the number of people with Parkinson's worldwide will double to 25 million.<sup>1</sup>

## Sources

<sup>1</sup> [www.parkinsons.org.uk/information/about-parkinsons](http://www.parkinsons.org.uk/information/about-parkinsons) (April 2026)



It's important to remember that Parkinson's disease will affect each person differently.



### Symptoms that affect movement:

- Tremor - commonly associated with Parkinson's disease. This symptom happens because of low dopamine levels disrupting the balance between different brain signals that control movement.
- Slow movement - this is called bradykinesia. Again, caused by the low levels of dopamine, meaning the brain struggles to activate movement.
- Muscle stiffness - the low dopamine affects muscle control, the muscles stay tensed rather than relaxed.
- Loss of balance - the area of the brain that controls balance is affected. Balance becomes very hard for people suffering from Parkinson's disease.

### Parkinson's disease affects brain chemicals which lead to other symptoms, not just related to movement, these include;

- Fatigue
- Difficulty sleeping
- Anxiety
- Low mood
- Memory loss (in later stages)



# Getting diagnosed

Parkinson's can be difficult to diagnose. There is no definitive test for Parkinson's so diagnosis can take time. Another factor to consider is that the symptoms are variable and could be linked to other

Whilst younger people can get Parkinson's, it is more common among people over 50.

Testing may include CT scan (Computerised Tomography scan) and MRI scan (Magnetic Resonance Imaging scan). These scans do not definitively diagnose Parkinson's disease, but they may be helpful to rule out other conditions which may be causing the symptoms.

PET (Positron Emission Tomography scan) can help diagnose Parkinson's disease by allowing doctors to check dopamine levels in the brain, however, it may not be available in all hospitals.



# Stages of Parkinson's



## Early stage

Parkinson's is often diagnosed at this point.

- The early symptoms often only affect one side of the body
- Slight tremor or stiffness
- Still able to carry out most activities of daily living.



## Mid stage

- Both sides of the body affected
- Walking and balance become more difficult
- Tasks may take longer
- Medication may need to be reviewed.



## Advanced stage

- Movement becomes significantly more difficult
- Increased risk of falling
- May need more support with activities of daily living as symptoms become more prominent.



# Different types of Parkinson's disease

## Idiopathic Parkinson's Disease (PD)

This is the most common type of Parkinson's disease.

85-90% of cases are PD.

The cause of PD and reduced dopamine levels is unknown.

Onset is usually gradual, and effects mostly over 50's and is slow progressing.

Key features

- Tremor
- Slowness of movement (bradykinesia)
- Rigidity.

## Drug induced Parkinson's

This type of Parkinson's is caused by medications that block dopamine receptors (antipsychotics, some anti-nausea medications).

Onset can be days after starting medication. This type of Parkinsonism is often reversible once medication is stopped.

Key features:

- Rigidity
- Slowness of movement
- Tremor less prominent.

## Genetic Parkinson's disease (familial)

This is less common and is caused by inherited gene mutations.

Onset of familial Parkinson's disease can be earlier than PD - sometimes before 50.

Key features:

- Tremor
- Slowness of movement
- Rigidity.

## Vascular Parkinson's

Vascular Parkinson's is caused by multiple strokes. Onset is sudden.

Key features:

- Lower body symptoms such as 'shuffle walking'
- Less tremor
- Other stroke related symptoms e.g. speech impairment.

# Managing symptoms

Currently there is no cure for Parkinson's, however, medication can help to manage symptoms effectively. The aim of medication is to replace dopamine. Therapies

Physiotherapy - improves movement and strength through physical exercise and education following illness, injury or disability.

Speech and language therapy - improves communication, speech, language and swallowing difficulties caused by illness, injury or disability.

Occupational therapy - this can help to maintain or regain the ability to carry out everyday tasks.

Establishing good sleep routines.

A balanced diet.

Exercise.



# Emotional support

If you or someone you know is diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, it is important to remember there is support available. A good place to start is your GP who can signpost you to support services both nationally and locally. Parkinson's UK also have a wide range of information available, you can contact them on the details below.

 Call Parkinson's UK on 020 7931 80801901

 Visit their website at [www.parkinsons.org.uk/](http://www.parkinsons.org.uk/)



**Parkinson's UK are a charity committed to supporting people every step of the way throughout every stage of Parkinson's.**

We don't wait for change, we make it happen. We believe that together we'll find a cure. But that's not all we're working for. We campaign for better health and care, fund research into ground breaking new treatments, and run life-changing support services.

Families, volunteers, campaigners, fundraisers, scientists, health and care workers. We're a powerful community united by one mission: improving life with Parkinson's.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Sources - [www.parkinsons.org.uk/about-us/our-mission](http://www.parkinsons.org.uk/about-us/our-mission) (April 2026)

# Sources for information

[Parkinson's disease - NHS](#)

[NHS continuing healthcare | Parkinson's UK](#)

[Cure Parkinson's | UK charity working to end Parkinson's](#)

[What is Parkinson's? | Parkinson's Foundation](#)



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