

# Speech and language therapy and Parkinson's

Some people with Parkinson's may find they have problems with their speech and communication.

This information sheet looks at what difficulties you may experience and how speech and language therapy can help.

## What is a speech and language therapist?

Speech and language therapists are healthcare professionals who specialise in all aspects of communication, from facial expression and body language to speech and communication aids.

They can also help with the swallowing problems that some people with Parkinson's may experience. They are part of the multidisciplinary team of healthcare professionals who can help you manage your condition.

They will talk to you about any communication problems you are having and give you some techniques, or tips, to help reduce them. They may also be able to help you prevent problems from happening.

## Why would I need to see a speech and language therapist?

Clinical guidelines say that people with Parkinson's should have access to speech and language therapy, which can help with the speech problems that some people can have. For example, some people find their voice may be slurred, hoarse or unsteady, or quieter than it used to be. Some people with Parkinson's also find their voice can sound monotonous. It may be hard to control the pace of speech, for example, some people may talk more slowly or more quickly than they used to.

“I've had intensive therapy and I think I have maintained a good level of control over my speech. This is very important to me, because I often read poetry aloud, occasionally at public readings.”

**Diana, diagnosed in 2004**

It can also become more difficult to talk clearly while doing other tasks or activities at the same time.

Some people with Parkinson's have issues with facial expression because of difficulty controlling their facial muscles. Body language can also be affected by Parkinson's symptoms, which can include slowness of movement (also known as bradykinesia), stiffness and tremor.

Swallowing can become difficult for some people, which can cause problems when eating or drinking. Other problems may include producing too much or too little saliva, causing dribbling. This is sometimes called sialorrhoea.

**Find out more:** [see our information sheet Eating, swallowing and saliva control.](#)

## When should I see a speech and language therapist?

We recommend you speak to a speech and language therapist as early as you can after you've been diagnosed. Even if you aren't experiencing any specific problems, a speech and language therapist can give you some useful information about possible problems that may occur, how to spot them and what can be done about them.

The therapist may also spot any subtle changes that you may not be aware of. This will help you manage the problem before it becomes more difficult.

Your first appointment is likely to involve an assessment. This will give your speech and language therapist an idea of what treatment you need. The therapy that you receive and the number of sessions you have will depend on your individual needs.

## How can a speech and language therapist help me?

In the early stages of Parkinson's, a speech and language therapist will be focusing on maintaining as much of your communication abilities as possible.

They will develop strategies and exercises to help with issues such as volume or loudness of speech, breathing and voice, speed of talking, facial expression and articulation (pronouncing words clearly).

A speech and language therapist will also talk to you about the type of environment you communicate in, because this can play an important part in how your problems are affecting your everyday life. For example, if you work in a very noisy office where a soft or quiet voice is difficult to hear.

Your therapist can help you with any problems you have with eating and drinking (such as swallowing and drooling). If you are experiencing these problems, the therapy can become more intensive. Your therapist may also suggest small pieces of equipment and special tools to help with particular problems.

If communicating has become very difficult for you, a speech and language therapist can give you advice on alternative means of communication. These may include communication aids.

## I've heard about the Lee Silverman Voice Treatment, what is this?

The Lee Silverman Voice Treatment is a type of speech therapy developed specifically for people with Parkinson's. It focuses on improving voice loudness to help with daily communication. The programme helps people with Parkinson's to recognise that their voice is too quiet and trains them to use a louder voice.

## What advice can a speech and language therapist give carers or family members?

Speech and language therapists can give carers or family members strategies and tips to help a person with Parkinson's to communicate more effectively.

These may include simple things such as watching a speaker's face while they are talking, and limiting background noise, such as sound from a television or radio.

**Find out more:** see our information sheet [Communication and Parkinson's](#).

Carers and family members may also be given advice on how to spot the signs that someone may be having problems eating or drinking.

**Find out more:** see our information sheet [Eating, swallowing and saliva control](#).

## How do I find a speech and language therapist?

Your GP or Parkinson's nurse (if you have one) can refer you to a speech and language therapist. It can be helpful to be referred by a healthcare professional, because the speech and language therapist will then have a point of contact for medical information. Medical referrals are often required for swallowing assessment and treatment.

If necessary, you can make a self-referral. Under the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists' 'Communicating Quality' guidelines, all speech and language therapy should be available through self-referral to the local hospital trust or board. Not all speech and language therapists are specialists in Parkinson's, so make sure you ask to see someone who has experience of working with people living with the condition.

You can also pay for private speech and language therapy. You may have this individually or within a group. If you're interested in finding a private speech and language therapist in your area, contact the Association of Speech and Language Therapists in Independent Practice. See page 4 for contact details.

You can also contact your local information and support worker for details of speech and language therapy services in your area. Find out more about information and support workers below.

## Is there anything I can do to help myself?

If you are having problems speaking, Parkinson's medication, such as levodopa, might help improve the volume or clarity of your speech. Speak to your GP, specialist or Parkinson's nurse for more information.

There are also practical things you can do that may help you train your voice and exercise the muscles in your throat. These include trying to imagine that you are speaking in a bigger room than you are, because this will help you to speak clearly and loudly.

**Find out more:** see our information sheet [Communication and Parkinson's](#).

## More information and support

### Parkinson's nurses

Parkinson's nurses provide expert advice and support to people with Parkinson's and those who care for them. They can also act as a liaison between other health and social care professionals to make sure your needs are met.

Parkinson's nurses may not be available in every area, but your GP or specialist can give you more details on local services.

### Information and support workers

Our information and support workers provide advice and information for anyone affected by Parkinson's. They can also provide links to local services.

For details of the local information and support worker in your area, contact our helpline on **0808 800 0303** or email **hello@parkinsons.org.uk**. You can also find out more on our website at **parkinsons.org.uk/isw**

## Our helpline

You can also call our free confidential helpline for general support and information. Call **0808 800 0303** (calls are free from UK landlines and most mobile networks) or email **hello@parkinsons.org.uk**

## Local groups

Support is available through Parkinson's UK local groups. Visit **parkinsons.org.uk/groups** or call our helpline for details of your nearest meeting.

## Online forum

Speak to others in a similar situation through our online discussion forum at **parkinsons.org.uk/forum**

## Association of Speech and Language Therapists in Independent Practice

01494 488 306  
[www.helpwithtalking.com](http://www.helpwithtalking.com)

## Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists

020 7378 1200  
[www.rcslt.org](http://www.rcslt.org)

## Thank you

Thank you to everyone who contributed to and reviewed this information sheet:

**Julia Johnson, Clinical Specialist Speech and Language Therapist (Neurology), King's College Hospital NHS Trust**

**Dr Aileen Ho, Senior Lecturer, University of Reading**

Thanks also to our information review group and other people affected by Parkinson's who provided feedback.



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## Speech and language therapy and Parkinson's

If you have comments or suggestions about this information sheet, we'd love to hear from you. This will help us ensure that we are providing as good a service as possible.

We'd be very grateful if you could complete this form and return it to [Information Resources, Parkinson's UK, 215 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 1EJ](#). Or you can email us at [publications@parkinsons.org.uk](mailto:publications@parkinsons.org.uk). Thanks!

### Please tick...

- I have Parkinson's. When were you diagnosed? .....
- I'm family/a friend/a carer of someone with Parkinson's
- I'm a professional working with people with Parkinson's

Where did you get this information sheet from?

- GP, specialist or Parkinson's nurse
- Parkinson's UK local group or event
- Our website
- Information and support worker
- Ordered from us directly
- Other .....

We're the Parkinson's support and research charity. Help us find a cure and improve life for everyone affected by Parkinson's.

### Can you help?

At Parkinson's UK, we are totally dependent on donations from individuals and organisations to fund the work that we do. There are many ways that you can help us to support people with Parkinson's. If you would like to get involved, please contact our Supporter Services team on **020 7932 1303** or visit our website at **parkinsons.org.uk/support**. Thank you.

### Parkinson's UK

Free\* confidential helpline **0808 800 0303**

Monday to Friday 9am–8pm, Saturday 10am–2pm. Interpreting available.

Text Relay **18001 0808 800 0303**

(for textphone users only)

**hello@parkinsons.org.uk**

**parkinsons.org.uk**

\*calls are free from UK landlines and most mobile networks.

### How to order our resources

**01473 212115**

**resources@parkinsons.org.uk**

**parkinsons.org.uk/publications**

We make every effort to make sure that our services provide up-to-date, unbiased and accurate information. We hope that this will add to any professional advice you receive and will help you to make any decisions you may face. Please do continue to talk to your health and social care team if you are worried about any aspect of living with Parkinson's.

References for this information sheet can be found in the Microsoft Word version at **parkinsons.org.uk/publications**

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How useful have you found the information sheet? (1 is not useful, 4 is very useful) 1 2 3 4

Have you found the publication easy to read/use?  Yes  No

What aspects did you find most helpful? .....

Were you looking for any information that wasn't covered? .....

Do you have any other comments? .....

If you would like to become a member of Parkinson's UK, or are interested in joining our information review group, please complete the details below and we'll be in touch.

Membership  Information review group (who give us feedback on new and updated resources)

Name .....

Address .....

Telephone ..... Email .....