

## Compulsive Behaviour and Parkinson's

### What is compulsive behaviour?

Compulsive disorders are associated with a person's inability to resist a temptation or impulse that may ultimately cause harm to themselves or others. In a lot of cases, this behaviour may be out of character for the person.

### How does this relate to Parkinson's?

There are several categories of drugs for the treatment of Parkinson's and it is thought that there may be a connection between some dopamine agonists (one class of drugs that can be used to treat Parkinson's) and the incidence of compulsive behaviour.

However, clinical studies have shown this to be an uncommon side effect, currently estimated to occur in up to 14% of people taking dopamine agonists. Some studies have suggested that other types of anti-Parkinson's medication can produce similar side effects.

### What types of compulsive behaviour might be experienced?

Compulsive behaviour can be expressed in a number of ways and below are just a few examples:

#### Pathological (addictive) gambling

Pathological gambling is defined as a failure to resist gambling impulses despite severe personal or family consequences.

Because gambling has become more accessible than before, there may be more people affected by compulsive gambling than has been suggested in the published research studies. For more information, see the PDS information sheet *Gambling and Parkinson's* (code FS84).

### Hypersexuality

People with this condition will find themselves preoccupied with sexual feelings and thoughts. Sexual impulses become more intense, spontaneous and compulsive – all of which can cause distress to the person with hypersexuality and their partner.

Other forms of inappropriate sexual behaviour can also occur. For more information, see the PDS information sheet *Hypersexuality and Parkinson's* (code FS87).

### Compulsive (binge) eating

This occurs when people eat large amounts of food in short periods of time due to a lack of control of their appetite. It is usually associated with a significant increase in body weight.

A person may eat alone due to being embarrassed about the amounts of food and this may lead to feelings of guilt.

### Compulsive shopping

This is a preoccupation with buying or shopping and a person will experience an irresistible need to purchase more than they can afford or need at the time. This may also cause financial problems similar to those associated with gambling.

### Punding

Punding, or 'compulsive hobbyism' may be defined as a complex stereotyped behaviour, characterised by an intense fascination with repetitive manipulations of technical equipment, the continual handling, examining, and sorting of common objects, grooming, hoarding, pointless driving or walkabouts, and the engagement in extended monologues devoid of content.

Punding can be a side effect of Parkinson's medication and can lead to significant



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social and occupational impairment – social avoidance, severe sleep deprivation and disintegration of family relationships.

### **Addiction to anti-Parkinson's medication**

This occurs when a person takes more of a drug than is normally required to control their Parkinson's symptoms, even though it may lead to side effects such as severe abnormal involuntary movement (dyskinesia). The person may also experience drug withdrawal if the drug is not available. This type of compulsion is known as dopamine dysregulation syndrome.

### **How do compulsive behaviours occur in Parkinson's?**

Dopamine is a chemical messenger in the brain that is affected in Parkinson's. As well as helping to regulate movement, balance and walking, it also plays a central role in the behavioural reward system within the brain.

The behavioural problems outlined in this sheet are known as Impulse Control Disorder (ICD). ICD is most likely to occur in people diagnosed with Parkinson's under the age of 50. It is possible that ICD may affect those with a potential genetic susceptibility and/or an underlying behavioural vulnerability as it is more likely to happen in people who have a previous history of novelty-seeking or risk-taking behaviours or have a personal or family history of alcoholism or drug abuse.

### **What can be done to help?**

It is important to realise that impulse control disorder is abnormal and a person experiencing it should seek help from a Parkinson's Disease Nurse Specialist (PDNS), neurologist or hospital physician urgently.

As the person themselves may not realise that there is a problem, it is key that carers and family members note any abnormal behaviour and discuss it with the appropriate professional at the earliest possible stage. Treatment strategies can involve reducing the daily dose of Parkinson's medication, undertaking psychotherapy and also considering whether other types of medication should be introduced.

The PDS does not advise anyone to stop taking their Parkinson's drugs without seeking the advice of their health professional. Changes to a Parkinson's medication regimen should only be made with the advice of a Parkinson's specialist.

Adverse secondary responses to drugs can take many forms and the Society's Helpline deals with many enquiries related to side effects each year. You can call the Helpline on 0808 800 0303.

You can also report this side effect to the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Authority (MHRA), the Government body responsible for ensuring medicines work and are acceptably safe.

To report a side effect, or suspected side effect, of your medication you will need to complete a Yellow Card form, which you can obtain from your pharmacist, GP, specialist and via the Yellow Card hotline (0808 100 3352) during business hours. Alternatively you can complete this form online, or download and print it out from [www.mhra.gov.uk](http://www.mhra.gov.uk)

If debt has become a problem the following agencies may be able to help:



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**National Debtline:** 0808 808 4000

**Consumer Credit Counselling Service:**  
0800 138 1111

If you wish to seek legal advice about any of these issues, you can obtain information about solicitors from:

**The Law Society**

Tel: 0870 606 2555

Email: [info.services@lawsociety.org.uk](mailto:info.services@lawsociety.org.uk)

Website: [www.lawsociety.org.uk](http://www.lawsociety.org.uk)



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215 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 1EJ, UK

**Tel:** 020 7931 8080 **Fax:** 020 7233 9908

**Helpline:** 0808 800 0303. (The Helpline is a confidential service.

Calls are free from UK landlines and some mobile networks)

**Email:** enquiries@parkinsons.org.uk **Website:** www.parkinsons.org.uk

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To obtain any PDS resource, please go online to [www.parkinsons.org.uk](http://www.parkinsons.org.uk) or contact Sharward Services Ltd, the appointed PDS Distribution House, at Westerfield Business Centre, Main Road, Westerfield, Ipswich, Suffolk IP6 9AB, tel: 01473 212115, fax: 01473 212114, email: [pds@sharward.co.uk](mailto:pds@sharward.co.uk)