

Can we predict Parkinson's?



Project information

Lead researcher	Dr Alastair Noyce
Location	University of London
Cost	£35,000 over 12 months
Start date	April 2011
Type of project	Innovation
Project code	K-1006

Project background

One reason why we don't yet have a cure for Parkinson's is because the movement features of the condition only appear once 70-80% of the dopamine-producing nerve cells in the brain have already been lost. The nerve cells start dying many years before symptoms appear, and we don't know enough yet about the very early stages of Parkinson's. If we could identify people early – before the movement problems appear – we would be in the best possible position to slow, stop or even reverse Parkinson's.

Identifying people with Parkinson's at the earliest possible stage:

- **Understanding the very early symptoms.** Recent research suggests that problems including loss of sense of smell, sleep problems, constipation, anxiety and depression may occur many years before the movement problems of Parkinson's appear.
- **But these are all fairly common problems.** Many older people probably experience one or two of them at some stage. So finding people who experience several of these issues together may be the key to identifying Parkinson's in the very early stages.

What the researchers are doing

Predict PD is an innovative pilot project that aims to develop tests that can identify people at higher risk of Parkinson's before the symptoms appear. Alastair and the team have combined a set of three simple online tests that screen for factors known to be linked to increased risk of Parkinson's.

The research team aim to recruit 1000 healthy people aged between 60 and 80 years, who have access to the Internet, and do not have a current diagnosis of Parkinson's. Through the Predict PD website participants will complete:

- an online questionnaire that collects information on various medical and lifestyle factors that may influence risk of Parkinson's
- a smell test containing 40 'scratch and sniff' odours
- and a simple keyboard tap test to measure accuracy and speed of movement in peoples arms

The research team will then analyse each persons' scores in these three tests to work out which aspects are likely to be most helpful for predicting Parkinson's in the future.

How the research will help people with Parkinson's

This pilot study will help us refine our tests to work out risk of Parkinson's with maximum accuracy. If successful, this project will lead on to larger studies to develop the tests further. If we can predict Parkinson's, we hope to one day have treatments for those in the early stages that could slow or prevent the condition progressing – which would be a major step forwards towards a cure.

For more information, please talk to the Research Team

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