

Tremor and Parkinson's

Tremor is one of the three symptoms most often associated with Parkinson's (alongside rigidity and slowness of movement). This information sheet explains what a Parkinson's tremor is, what can be done to manage this symptom and where you can get further advice and support.

What is a tremor?

A tremor is an uncontrollable movement that affects a part of the body, for example the hand.

Having a tremor is a common feature of Parkinson's, but it doesn't necessarily mean you have Parkinson's. It can also be a symptom of other conditions. For example, a common type of tremor is an 'essential tremor', which is a trembling of the hands, head, legs, body or voice, most noticeable when you are moving. Sometimes essential or dystonic tremor (which you can get if you have dystonia, a range of movement disorders that cause muscle spasms and contractions) can be difficult to tell apart from a Parkinson's tremor.

What is a Parkinson's tremor?

A tremor caused by Parkinson's can appear in two ways:

- A resting tremor might happen when your body is relaxed, for example when you're lying in bed. The most typical tremor in Parkinson's is called a 'pill-rolling' rest tremor, as it looks like you are trying to roll a pill between your thumb and index finger. A Parkinson's tremor is more likely to happen when you're still (a 'resting tremor').
- An action tremor can also happen when you're doing something, like trying to hold a magazine or drink from a cup.

Usually, a specialist will be able to carry out a clinical assessment to see whether you have Parkinson's tremor or essential tremor. Sometimes, further tests, such as a brain scan called a DaTSCAN, may be helpful.

Speak to your GP if you're experiencing a tremor.

What causes a Parkinson's tremor?

People with Parkinson's don't have enough of a chemical called dopamine. This is because some nerve cells in their brain that produce dopamine have died. Without it, the symptoms of Parkinson's appear, and these may include a tremor.

For some people, a tremor can be the first symptom of Parkinson's. But not everyone with Parkinson's experiences the same symptoms, so not everyone with the condition will have a tremor at the point of diagnosis.

If I have Parkinson's, will this symptom develop eventually?

It's not possible to predict whether or not you will develop a tremor, as the condition varies from person to person.

If you do develop a tremor, speak to your GP or specialist about the change in your symptoms.

You can also speak to your Parkinson's nurse, if you have one. A Parkinson's nurse is a qualified registered general nurse with specialist experience, knowledge and skills in Parkinson's. They play a vital role in the care of people with Parkinson's. You can read more about them on page 4.

Will my tremor get worse as my Parkinson's progresses?

Although medication may help control this symptom, a Parkinson's tremor does usually get worse over time. However, this is generally quite a slow process that happens over several years. For many people with Parkinson's, their tremor isn't constant but comes and goes. How it affects them can also change a lot.

Typically, a Parkinson's tremor starts in the hand before 'spreading' to affect the rest of the arm. The tremor can also spread to affect the foot on the same side of the body. Occasionally, a Parkinson's tremor starts elsewhere, for example in the foot, then it may spread up the leg and then into the arm. After several years, the tremor can spread to affect the other side of the body.

In severe cases, the tremor can affect other parts of the body, including the lips or jaw. Some people also experience an 'internal tremor'. This is a feeling of tremor within the body which isn't noticeable to other people. The treatment for internal tremor is the same as for an external tremor.

Some people can develop tremor-dominant Parkinson's. This is where a tremor becomes the main symptom that needs managing. People usually experience fewer falls and problems with mobility when this happens.

If your tremor does get worse, speak to your GP, specialist or Parkinson's nurse about the change in your symptoms.

Can anything else make my tremor worse?

If you have Parkinson's, you might find your tremor gets worse in stressful situations. This is temporary and the tremor should settle when you're feeling more relaxed.

“On my commute into work, I find that if I centre myself and find somewhere to stand where I can hold on with both hands, it's easier. I think some people jump to conclusions if they see a young girl shaking, and would probably think that I'm up to something dodgy or on drugs. So I find that if I can hold onto the bar so my shaky hand doesn't shake, I feel a lot more balanced and in control.”

Emma, 31, lives in London and enjoys crafts.

Some drugs, such as tranquilisers, anti-sickness and anti-dizziness medications, can make a Parkinson's tremor worse. Some anti-asthma drugs, antidepressants and anti-epileptic drugs could also make your tremor more noticeable.

It is worth looking at the product information sheet that comes with any medication you are prescribed to see if that particular medicine can either cause or make a tremor worse.

However, you might still need to take these medications, so if you have any concerns about the drugs you take, speak to your GP, specialist or Parkinson's nurse.

How can I manage my tremor?

There is no cure for a tremor, but there are ways to manage the symptom.

In the early stages of Parkinson's, some people might be able to suppress their hand tremor by squeezing or rolling a ball, pen or similar object.

Speak to your specialist or Parkinson's nurse for advice. You may also find it useful to speak with other people who are experiencing tremor, to find out what they do to help. See page 4 for information about our local groups, online forum and peer support service.

There are also other things you can do to help control your tremor:

Medication

Usually, Parkinson's medication can help control a tremor. This includes levodopa (sometimes known by brand names including Sinemet and Madopar) and some dopamine agonists.

You can find out more about Parkinson's drugs in our booklet *Drug treatments for Parkinson's*, or speak to your specialist or Parkinson's nurse about what may suit you.

There are other drugs that may also lessen your tremor. As everyone with Parkinson's has a different experience of the condition, it's best to speak to your GP, specialist or Parkinson's nurse about possible medication options for you.

Stress relief

Anxiety or stress can make a tremor worse, so it's important to find ways to relax.

Exercise may help and also improve your sense of wellbeing. Some people have also found complementary therapies, such as aromatherapy, yoga, reflexology and music and art therapy, have helped them to relax.

Find out more: see our booklet *Complementary therapies and Parkinson's*.

Deep brain stimulation

Deep brain stimulation is a form of surgery that is used to control some of the symptoms of Parkinson's, including tremor. It involves passing small electrical currents through electrodes that are permanently implanted in the brain.

Deep brain stimulation isn't a suitable option for everyone and, like any surgery, there are some risks involved. You may be offered this type of treatment if your symptoms are severe and medical treatment is no longer effective.

Find out more: see our booklet *Surgery for 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 make contact with other health and social care professionals to make sure your needs are met.

The role of the Parkinson's nurse varies. Each will offer different services, aiming to meet local needs. Some nurses are based in the community, whereas others are based in hospital settings.

Many Parkinson's nurses are independent prescribers. This means they can prescribe and make adjustments to medication, so someone with Parkinson's doesn't always need to see their specialist for changes to or queries about their Parkinson's drugs.

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

You can find out more at parkinsons.org.uk/nurses

Information and support from Parkinson's UK

You can 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. We run a peer support service if you'd like to talk on the phone with someone affected by Parkinson's who has faced similar issues to you. The service is free and confidential – ring the helpline to talk to someone about being matched with a volunteer.

Our helpline can also put you in touch with one of our Parkinson's local advisers, who give one-to-one information and support to anyone affected by Parkinson's. They can also provide links to local groups and services.

We also have a self-management programme for people with Parkinson's, partners and carers. It is an opportunity to reflect on life with the condition, learn about self-management and think about the future. To find out if there is a group near you visit parkinsons.org.uk/selfmanagement

Our website parkinsons.org.uk has a lot of information about Parkinson's and everyday life with the condition. You can also find details of your local support team and your nearest local group meeting at parkinsons.org.uk/localtoyou

You can also visit parkinsons.org.uk/forum to speak with other people in a similar situation on our online discussion forum.

Thank you

Thank you very much to everyone who contributed to or reviewed this information sheet:

Huw Morris, professor of Neurology, Cardiff University and Royal Gwent Hospital

Annette Hand, Nurse Consultant, North Tyneside General Hospital

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

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 **0800 138 6593** or visit our website at **parkinsons.org.uk/donate**. Thank you.

Our information

All of our most up-to-date information is available at **parkinsons.org.uk/information-support**

If you'd prefer to read one of our printed leaflets or booklets, find out how to place an order at **parkinsons.org.uk/ordering-resources** or by calling **0300 123 3689**.

We make every effort to ensure that our services provide current, unbiased and accurate information. We hope that this will add to any professional advice you receive and 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.

If you'd like to find out more about how we put our information together, including references and the sources of evidence we use, please contact us at **publications@parkinsons.org.uk**



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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 **Editorial and Creative Services, Parkinson's UK, 215 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 1EJ**. Or you can email us at **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 local adviser
- Parkinson's UK local group or event
- Ordered from us directly
- Our website
- Other

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

Has this resource given you information that might help you manage your condition better?

- NA
- It hasn't helped
- It has helped a little
- It has helped a lot

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

What is your ethnic background? Asian/Asian British Black/Black British White

- Mixed/multiple ethnic backgrounds
- Other (please specify)

Every hour, two people in the UK are told they have Parkinson's – a brain condition that turns lives upside down, leaving a future full of uncertainty.

Parkinson's UK is here to make sure people have whatever they need to take back control – from information to inspiration.

We want everyone to get the best health and social care. So we bring professionals together to drive improvements that enable people to live life to the full.

Ultimately, we want to end Parkinson's. That's why we inspire and support the international research community to develop life-changing treatments, faster. And we won't stop until we find a cure.

Together we can bring forward the day when no one fears Parkinson's.

Parkinson's UK

Free confidential helpline **0808 800 0303**

Monday to Friday 9am–7pm, Saturday 10am–2pm. Interpreting available.

NGT Relay **18001 0808 800 0303** (for use with smart phones, tablets, PCs and other devices).

For more information see **www.ngts.org.uk**

hello@parkinsons.org.uk

parkinsons.org.uk

Last updated July 2016. We review our information within three years.

Please check our website for the most up-to-date versions of all our information.

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