

Mild memory and thinking problems in Parkinson's

Mild memory and thinking problems can be part of the normal ageing process, but can also affect some people with Parkinson's.

This information sheet explains the symptoms and some of the possible causes. It also gives helpful tips and advice on what you can do to make living with these problems a bit easier.

What are mild memory and thinking problems?

This is when you have difficulty recalling things, finding words and making decisions, but you can generally continue your day-to-day life without too much trouble. Your doctor may use the term 'mild cognitive impairment' to describe this. Mild memory and thinking problems will not affect all people with Parkinson's, and can occur at any stage of the condition.

If you are having these problems, you and your family and friends will probably have noticed. It's natural to worry about this change, but it doesn't necessarily mean your symptoms are caused by something more serious, such as dementia. Dementia in Parkinson's is diagnosed when thinking and memory problems are bad enough to interfere with your ability to do your daily activities (more than the usual difficulties caused by movement problems in Parkinson's).

Find out more: see our information sheet *Parkinson's dementia*.

What are the symptoms?

You may have difficulty with activities such as planning, multitasking, moving quickly from one activity to another or doing tasks in a particular order. This may mean you feel less efficient or less organised than you used to be, or you may get confused, particularly if you're feeling stressed.

Problems with attention and concentration can make daily tasks, such as reading a newspaper article from start to finish, more difficult. You may experience slower thought processes, so it could take you longer to make decisions or to respond to questions.

If you've had surgery for Parkinson's, such as deep brain stimulation, you may have some specific problems

with talking, concentration and complex thinking. However, some people find that the surgery improves their memory.

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

What are the causes?

We still don't fully understand why mild memory and thinking problems happen in Parkinson's. They could be caused by problems in the pathways that pass messages from one part of the brain to another.

There may also be other explanations for your symptoms. These include:

Anxiety and depression

Anxiety and depression can have a big impact on your ability to think, remember and deal with information properly. They may affect your attention span and concentration. If you are feeling down or depressed, see your GP, specialist or Parkinson's nurse for help and advice. It's also important to try to find ways to relax.

Find out more: see our information sheets *Depression and Parkinson's* and *Anxiety and Parkinson's*.

Sleep problems

Difficulty in sleeping can lead to excessive daytime sleepiness. Some Parkinson's medication can also make you feel sleepy. If you're feeling tired or run down, this may affect your thinking, concentration and memory. Talk to your GP, specialist or Parkinson's nurse about ways to deal with any sleep problems.

Find out more: see our booklet *Sleep and night-time problems in Parkinson's*.

Diet and general health

Make sure you're eating a healthy diet and getting all the vitamins you need, as this may help to improve your general health. Common health problems, such as infections, particularly in older people, can cause difficulties with thinking and memory, but are easily treated. Speak to your GP, specialist or Parkinson's nurse for more information.

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

What can be done about mild memory and thinking problems?

Some Parkinson's medications, particularly levodopa, may improve memory and concentration. But, in some cases, levodopa may cause confusion. Anticholinergic drugs and dopamine agonists may also have a negative impact on thinking clearly, particularly in older people with more serious memory and thinking problems.

It's important to tell your specialist or Parkinson's nurse about any memory and thinking problems you're having. They'll be able to adjust your Parkinson's medication, if necessary, and advise you about services and other health professionals, such as occupational therapists, who may be able to give advice to you or your family about how to cope.

There are currently no specific medications to treat mild memory and thinking problems in Parkinson's. The medication used for Alzheimer's has not proved helpful for people with Parkinson's alone, but may help some who have dementia as well as Parkinson's.

“The exact right word seems to escape me, so I find myself talking about the ‘components’ of a recipe when I mean ‘ingredients’, or the ‘computer’ when I mean ‘television’.”

Caroline

If you or your family are concerned that your symptoms are getting worse, it may be possible to get some tests done with a psychologist. This usually involves paper-and-pencil tests of memory, attention, concentration and other aspects of thinking. The results of these tests may reveal the exact nature of your problems.

A psychologist may also be able to offer advice on ways to improve your memory. Ask your GP, specialist or Parkinson's nurse about getting referred.

“ I believe that if you keep your brain active it will help in the long term. I love quizzes, puzzles and computer games. ”

Steve

What can I do to manage this symptom?

If you find that mild memory and thinking problems are starting to affect your daily life, there are tips and techniques you can use to help.

Visual prompts

Having calendars, clocks, noticeboards and notices around the home may help jog your memory. You may find it helps to keep a list of things to do. You can see what you have achieved as you tick off each task.

Routine and being organised

Being as organised as possible may help you stay focused and keep stress to a minimum. Avoiding change in your daily routine, as far as you can, may also be helpful.

Remember that sometimes it might help if you slow down and tackle one thing at a time, rather than trying to multitask. Prioritise the things you have to do and the things you want to do, and choose which you can leave for later. Giving your undivided attention to whatever you are doing can help you to avoid mistakes or miscommunication. This can relieve stress and help you to feel in control.

Memory aids

- A 'memory basket' will help you to keep things like your keys, wallet and glasses all in one place.
- Medication dispensers and pill timers can be a useful reminder to take your medication, as it's important to take it at the times advised by your specialist or Parkinson's nurse.
- Most mobile phones have alarm settings that can be used to remind you to take your medication and attend appointments.
- Keep a diary of your symptoms. This may help you explain any issues when you see your healthcare professionals.

Find out more: see our information sheet *Keeping a diary: people with Parkinson's*.

Keeping it simple

If you're having difficulty remembering or following conversations, ask people to speak and explain things as clearly and simply as possible. They can also help you by providing information in several different ways. For example, they could write messages down for you, as well as talking to you face to face.

Maintaining independence and keeping active

It's important to keep your mind as active as possible, through exercise, hobbies and taking part in social activities. You could try some mental stimulation, such as doing crosswords or sudoku. You may need some support, but try to stay as independent as possible when going about your day-to-day life.

Driving

For many people, mild memory and thinking problems will not affect driving. However, if your symptoms do affect your ability to drive safely, you will need to inform the DVLA or DVA, who will then assess you. This does not necessarily mean you will have to stop driving. Your GP or Parkinson's nurse can advise on whether you need to contact the DVLA/DVA.

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

What can I do at work?

If you're still working, you may find it useful to adapt your working environment. Simple but effective changes include keeping your workspace tidy, trying to focus on one task at a time and reducing distractions when doing complex tasks. Occupational therapists can advise you on this. See your GP, specialist or Parkinson's nurse to ask about getting referred.

You may find it useful to rely more on colleagues for organisation and time keeping. You could also ask them to limit instructions to one task at a time.

Some people have found cutting back on their working hours or changing job roles has also made life easier, but this may not be possible for everyone.

Your employer has a legal duty to support you with your disability. In certain circumstances, they may agree to make some reasonable adjustments to your job to help you manage this symptom and continue working to the best of your ability.

Find out more: see our booklet *Work 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 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

Visit parkinsons.org.uk/forum to chat to other people with similar experiences on our online discussion forum.

Thank you

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

**Richard Grunewald, Consultant Neurologist, Division of Clinical Neurosciences,
Royal Hallamshire Hospital, Sheffield**

**Gillian Carey, Parkinson's Disease Nurse Specialist, University of Surrey and St Peter's Hospital,
Chertsey**

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**

Mild memory and thinking problems in Parkinson's (FS95/2017)

Do you have any feedback about this information? Your comments will help us ensure our resources are as useful and easy to understand as possible. Please return to [Information Content team, Parkinson's UK, 215 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 1EJ](#), or email publications@parkinsons.org.uk. Thank you!

1. Please choose the option that best fits you.

- I have Parkinson's and was diagnosed in I care for someone with Parkinson's
 I have a friend or family member with Parkinson's I'm a professional working with people with Parkinson's
 Other (please specify)
-

2. Where did you get this information from?

- GP Specialist Parkinson's nurse Parkinson's UK local group Parkinson's UK local adviser
 Ordered directly from us Call to the helpline
 Other (please specify)
-

3. Has it answered all your questions?

- Yes, completely Yes, mostly Not sure Partly Not at all

4. How easy was it to understand?

- Very easy Easy Not sure Quite difficult Very difficult

5. Has it helped you manage your condition better, or make choices that have improved your life in some way?

- It helped a lot It helped a little No change It didn't help It made things worse

6. What is your ethnic background?*

- Asian or Asian British Black or Black British Chinese Mixed White British White other
 Other (please specify)
-

*We ask about your ethnicity to ensure our information is reaching a broad range of people. However, this question is optional.

Want to hear more from us?

- I would like a response to my feedback I would like to be a member of Parkinson's UK
 I'm interested in joining the Information review group, to offer feedback on Parkinson's UK information

If you've answered yes to any of these options, please complete your details below.

Name

Address

Email Telephone

How would you prefer us to contact you? Email Post Phone

We will not pass on your details to any other organisation or third party. To find out more, read our privacy policy at [parkinsons.org.uk/termsandconditions](https://www.parkinsons.org.uk/termsandconditions)

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 update May 2017. We review our information within three years.

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

FS95

© Parkinson's UK. Parkinson's UK is the operating name of the Parkinson's Disease Society of the United Kingdom. A charity registered in England and Wales (258197) and in Scotland (SC037554).

