

# Anxiety and Parkinson's

**S**ome people with Parkinson's may experience anxiety.

**This information describes what anxiety is and how it can make you feel. It also looks at steps you can take to help manage your symptoms, and what treatments are available.**

## What is anxiety?

Anxiety is a feeling of unease, such as worry or fear. Everyone has feelings of anxiety from time to time. It's a natural reaction to situations we find threatening or difficult, like moving to a new house or money problems. Usually anxiety disappears when the situation changes, or if we get used to the situation or can move away from it. But some people become anxious for long periods of time and for no clear reason. This can make life difficult and may affect your work and social life.

If you feel anxiety is affecting your daily life, it's important to seek help from professionals as well as find things you can do to manage your symptoms effectively.

## What are the main symptoms of anxiety?

It's important to be able to recognise the symptoms of anxiety, so it can be treated as soon as possible.

People with anxiety may feel some of the following:

- a sense of dread
- constant worry
- difficulty concentrating

You may also experience physical symptoms if you're feeling anxious. These can include:

- sweating
- a pounding or racing heart (palpitations)
- tightness of the chest or feeling breathless
- dizziness
- trembling
- indigestion, nausea and stomach cramps
- looking pale
- a dry mouth
- muscle pain
- restless legs and difficulty maintaining restful sleep

When anxiety carries on for a long time you may have feelings of hopelessness. These feelings may affect your ability to carry out everyday activities.

Sometimes, you may have symptoms of depression as well as anxiety. Depression is more than temporary feelings of unhappiness or frustration. It's usually diagnosed when someone has lasting feelings of extreme sadness for days, weeks or months.

**Find out more:** [see our information on depression and Parkinson's](#)

## Are there different types of anxiety?

There are three main types of anxiety, though these can overlap. Many people will experience more than one type.

### Generalised anxiety disorder

This is when you experience excessive and uncontrollable worrying most of the time about everyday events in your life.

### Panic attacks

These are short periods of sudden, intense feelings of fear. They often happen in situations that are likely to make you feel anxious. You may also have a racing heart, sweating and shortness of breath. Some people think these symptoms are very serious, and they rush to the hospital for help. A panic attack may last between five and 20 minutes.

### Phobia

This is when you feel frightened of something that's not dangerous and would not usually make other people feel scared. For example, agoraphobia is the fear of being in situations where escape might be difficult, or help wouldn't be available if things go wrong.

## How does anxiety affect people with Parkinson's?

For people with and without Parkinson's, anxiety is likely caused by a combination of several factors, including imbalances in brain chemicals, genetics and stressful life events.

Any concerns you have about living with a long-term condition, such as Parkinson's, may also cause anxiety.

Some people with Parkinson's have anxiety that happens when they're 'off'. When a person takes their medication, their symptoms will improve. But these symptoms can sometimes come back before the next dose is due, causing a person's condition to fluctuate. This is called 'wearing off'.

If your anxiety symptoms increase when your medication is wearing off before the next dose is due, talk to your specialist or Parkinson's nurse. Changes to your medication regime may improve your symptoms.

If you go 'off' and have difficulties moving, it can also make you feel anxious. You may find that when your movement symptoms are better controlled by medication, your anxiety improves.

Even if you don't have 'on' and 'off' periods, you may still have generalised anxiety if your Parkinson's symptoms aren't properly treated. Again, changes to your medication may help.

Always speak to your specialist or Parkinson's nurse about any adjustments to your Parkinson's medication. Remember, don't stop taking your medication without talking to a healthcare professional, as this can be dangerous.

It's particularly important to talk to your healthcare professional about your anxiety as, in some cases, it may make other symptoms of Parkinson's worse. But getting help early can give you more control.

## How is anxiety managed?

There are many things you can try to help manage your symptoms.

### Finding ways to relax

Simple things like making time to relax can be helpful. Try doing things you enjoy, such as reading a book or listening to music.

### Diet

Try to eat a healthy, balanced diet. It can also help to avoid too much caffeine (found in tea, coffee and some fizzy drinks), and alcohol, especially late in the evening. These can make some of the physical symptoms of anxiety worse.

**Find out more:** see our information on diet and Parkinson's.

### Exercise

You can help combat stress and release anxiety through regular exercise, such as walking or swimming.

### Yoga

Yoga is a gentle exercise that aims to improve flexibility, strength, balance and breathing. There is some evidence that yoga could help with anxiety and stress.

### Tai chi

Tai chi is a Chinese martial art that puts emphasis on balance and movement. It involves moving the body slowly and gently – there's no physical contact. It may have psychological benefits, including reducing anxiety.

### Complementary therapies

We hear from many people with Parkinson's who find complementary therapies relaxing. These include:

#### Massage

Many people find that having a massage helps them relax. A massage therapist may use various techniques, including stroking, kneading and rubbing, to manipulate the body using pressure. Massage isn't suitable for people with certain medical conditions, such as a history of bleeding disorders.

#### Acupuncture

Acupuncture is part of traditional Chinese medicine. It involves a therapist inserting thin needles at particular points on your body. Although the

evidence that acupuncture can reduce anxiety is mixed, some people may find it helpful.

If you want to take anything by mouth or apply it to your skin as a complementary therapy, check with your GP, specialist or Parkinson's nurse first.

**Find out more:** see our information on complementary therapies and Parkinson's.

There may be relaxation classes in your area. Visit the Parkinson's UK website [parkinsons.org.uk](http://parkinsons.org.uk) and use our postcode search to find classes close to you.

### Friendships and meeting others

Sharing your worries and fears with a trusted friend or family member can help reduce anxiety. Talking to other people with Parkinson's can also help, as you can share your experiences and find out how others cope with similar problems. Parkinson's UK has local groups across the UK.

Visit [parkinsons.org.uk/localgroups](http://parkinsons.org.uk/localgroups) to find your nearest group or call **0808 800 0303**.

You can also talk to other people with Parkinson's online at [parkinsons.org.uk/forum](http://parkinsons.org.uk/forum)

### Counselling

If you prefer to speak to a professionally trained counsellor, ask your GP for information (many surgeries have counsellors attached to their practice). There are also counselling organisations that can give you information and details of private counsellors, including the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (see the end of this information).

The mental health charity Mind has a guide, *Making sense of talking treatments*. The booklet explains the different types of talking therapies available, including counselling, how they can help and what they involve.

You can read the guide online at [www.mind.org.uk/talkingtherapy](http://www.mind.org.uk/talkingtherapy) or order a hard copy.

### Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)

You may find cognitive behavioural therapy (sometimes called CBT) effective in dealing with anxiety. It works by changing 'unhelpful' everyday thoughts and behaviours that can lead to feelings of anxiety or make anxiety worse. CBT can take place in groups or individually with

a therapist, who may be a clinical psychologist, psychiatrist or specially trained nurse. It usually involves a course of weekly sessions.

There are a number of self-help CBT books that are recommended by the NHS for people with anxiety. Many of these are available at your local library via the 'Books on Prescription' scheme. Again, ask your GP or Parkinson's nurse for more advice or visit [reading-well.org.uk](http://reading-well.org.uk)

## Medication for anxiety

Anti-anxiety medication, such as antidepressants and anxiolytics may help with anxiety if you have Parkinson's, under certain circumstances. Long term use of anxiolytics are not generally recommended.

Speak to your GP, specialist or Parkinson's nurse about what may be best for you. They should also be able to advise you on how to take antidepressants alongside your Parkinson's medication.

## Advice for family, friends and carers

Anxiety symptoms can hugely affect someone's quality of life. If this happens, you should try to encourage the person affected to speak to their GP, specialist or Parkinson's nurse. They may be referred to a mental health specialist who can recommend treatment.

If you're a carer, it's completely natural for you to feel many of the same feelings as the person with Parkinson's. These feelings may include anxiety, fear about the future, depression, fatigue and concern about any changes in your relationship.

With this in mind, you should also try to look after your own physical and mental health as much as you can. Taking care of yourself can be difficult, but it's important. It will also help you be better able to care for your loved one.

Many carers find it helpful to join a support group where they can meet other people in a similar situation. Many Parkinson's UK local groups have special activities for carers.

Visit [parkinsons.org.uk/localgroups](http://parkinsons.org.uk/localgroups) for details of your local group or contact our helpline (0808 800 0303). Carers UK and Carers Trust also run groups for carers. See the next section for details..

**Find out more:** [see our information for carers.](#)

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## More information and support

### Anxiety UK

Anxiety UK has a range of information and support services for people with anxiety.

**03444 775 774**

**support@anxietyuk.org.uk**

**www.anxietyuk.org.uk**

### British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy

Visit the website to find a therapist near you.

**01455 883300**

**bacp@bacp.co.uk**

**www.bacp.co.uk**

### Carers Trust

This charity provides support, information and centres for carers throughout the UK and most centres run carers' groups.

London office **0300 772 9600**

Scotland office **0300 772 7701**

Wales office **0300 772 9702**

**info@carers.org**

**www.carers.org**

### Carers UK

Carers UK provides information and support to people who are caring at home. The charity has support groups, branches and local offices throughout the UK.

**0808 808 7777**

**advice@carersuk.org**

**www.carersuk.org**

### Mind

Mind is a leading mental health organisation serving people in England and Wales. The charity provides support and advice on all kinds of mental health problems, including depression. It has a range of publications and local support groups.

**0300 123 3393**

**info@mind.org.uk**

**www.mind.org.uk**

### Inspire

Inspire offers a range of services that provide support around mental health in Northern Ireland.

**028 9032 8474**

**hello@inspirewellbeing.org**

### 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**.

Our helpline can 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.

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:

**Lee Kieft, Parkinson's nurse, Lewisham and Greenwich Hospital NHS Trust**

**Amanda Mobley, Consultant Clinical Neuropsychologist, Worchestershire Health and Care NHS Trust**

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](https://parkinsons.org.uk/donate)**. Thank you.

## Our information

All of our most up-to-date information is available at **[parkinsons.org.uk/information-support](https://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](https://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](mailto:publications@parkinsons.org.uk)**



## Anxiety and Parkinson's (PKFS96/2019)

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](mailto: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

We're the Parkinson's charity that drives better care, treatments and quality of life.

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

Parkinson's UK  
215 Vauxhall Bridge Road  
London SW1V 1EJ

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**

Order code: PKFS96

Last updated October 2019. 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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### 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](http://parkinsons.org.uk/termsandconditions)