

Eyes and Parkinson's

Some people with Parkinson's experience problems with their eyes. These problems are sometimes caused by Parkinson's itself or by Parkinson's drugs.

This information describes eye problems that some people with Parkinson's experience, and looks at the treatment available.

How do I get help for eye problems?

If you're experiencing problems with your eyes, you should speak to your GP, Parkinson's nurse or specialist. They can make a referral to an eye specialist if needed.

If you need tests or treatment for your eyes, it's a good idea to tell the eye specialist that you have Parkinson's. This is so they can look out for Parkinson's-related eye problems and make sure you receive the right care and support.

Who treats eye problems?

Optometrists examine eyes and give advice on visual problems. They also prescribe and fit glasses or contact lenses. Some provide ongoing care for people with long-term eye conditions.

Ophthalmologists are medically trained doctors. They examine, diagnose and treat diseases and injuries in and around the eye.

Orthoptists diagnose and treat vision problems and abnormal eye movement. They usually work as part of a hospital care team.

How often should I get an eye test?

If you have Parkinson's, it's recommended that you have an eye test with an optometrist at least once a year. You should try to do this even if you aren't experiencing any problems with your eyes.

People with Parkinson's may experience the following problems with their eyes.

Difficulty moving the eyes

Parkinson's can affect your ability to move parts of the body. For some people, this includes the eyes.

You may have difficulties when starting to move your eyes or when trying to move them quickly. This might be more noticeable when looking at fast-moving objects, such as cars.

Sometimes, instead of a smooth movement, your eyes may move in a slow and jerky way.

These problems can make certain activities, such as driving, more difficult. If this happens, talk to your GP, specialist or Parkinson's nurse. See the section on driving and eye problems for more information.

Difficulties in moving the eyes up or down are more common in progressive supranuclear palsy (PSP) than Parkinson's. PSP is a rare condition that has symptoms similar to Parkinson's.

Find out more: see our information on driving and Parkinsonism.

Blurred vision

Blurred vision can be caused by difficulty moving the eyes.

It can also be a side effect of Parkinson's drugs, particularly anticholinergics (such as procyclidine).

Blurred vision might happen when you start taking anticholinergic drugs, but may improve with time as your body gets used to the medication.

Blurred vision can also happen after you've been taking anticholinergics for a long time, or when the dosage is changed.

If blurred vision continues or gets worse, speak to your GP, specialist or Parkinson's nurse.

If you wear reading glasses, a slight change to your prescription might improve blurred vision. Speak to your optometrist about this.

Double vision

Double vision is when you see two images of a single object at once. This can happen for varying amounts of time.

The two images you see may be on top of each other, side by side, or a mix of both. This is often caused by problems moving the eyes.

Some people with Parkinson's experience 'tracking'. This is when the eyes have problems moving smoothly across a line or from one object to another.

Poor co-ordination and fatigue of the muscles that move the eyeballs can mean that the eyes have trouble moving together, causing double vision.

There are other causes of double vision that are nothing to do with Parkinson's, such as thyroid problems, diabetes, or astigmatism.

If the problem continues, see your optometrist for advice, or ask your GP or specialist if you can be referred to an ophthalmologist for further tests. Slight changes in your glasses prescription might also help with double vision.

Dry eyes

People with Parkinson's may blink less often than other people. Blinking helps to remove dust and dirt, so if you blink less often these can build up, making your eyes dry or sore.

Dry eyes can have other causes, so see your optometrist for advice. They might suggest you try artificial tears. These are available from pharmacies and may help reduce discomfort and dryness.

Involuntary closing of the eyelids (eyelid apraxia)

Eyelid apraxia occurs when the muscles that open the eyelids have trouble opening.

This often happens during speech. Sometimes the eyelids might close completely and stop you being able to see properly.

The cause and treatment of eyelid apraxia is complicated because levodopa (a common Parkinson's drug) can cause it, but in some cases

it can improve it. Speak to your specialist or Parkinson's nurse for advice.

In mild cases of eyelid apraxia, simply rubbing the eyelids might help. Sometimes, injections of botulinum toxin (botox) are used to treat eyelid apraxia.

Problems with low light levels (contrast sensitivity)

You might find that it's difficult to see in low light levels. You may also be unable to make out the shape of things clearly, such as a light-coloured object on a light background. This can also affect your ability to read small print.

Colour vision problems

Some people with Parkinson's have difficulty telling the difference between certain colours. This problem may be worse for shades of blue or blue/green. You might find that your colour vision improves with Parkinson's medication.

Spatial awareness problems

You might have difficulty judging the space around you. You may find it difficult to judge the distance between objects, which can make it harder to move between pieces of furniture or through narrow doorways. Sometimes, reaching out to touch the sides of doorways or other objects can help.

An occupational therapist may be able to advise you on adapting your home or work space so you can manage this problem. Speak to your GP, specialist or Parkinson's nurse about a referral.

Problems with spatial awareness may mean you have to stop driving. See the section on driving and eye problems.

Find out more: see our [information on driving and occupational therapy](#).

Difficulty seeing movement

You might not see movement accurately, and seem unable to judge the speed of moving objects such as cars. If you experience this problem, try to take extra care when crossing roads or when driving, and speak to your health professional for advice.

Problems with glasses

Some people with Parkinson's find that their posture becomes stooped. This can cause problems if you wear glasses.

If you often lean forward, then you might find that you end up looking over your frames instead, or your glasses slip down. Your optician should be able to help you adjust your frames and lenses to suit your posture.

Driving and eye problems

You must tell the DVLA (or the DVA if you live in Northern Ireland) if you have any problem with your eyesight that affects both your eyes, or the remaining eye if you only have one eye.

For more information visit [gov.uk/driving-eyesight-rules](https://www.gov.uk/driving-eyesight-rules) or call **0300 790 6806**.

For Northern Ireland visit nidirect.gov.uk/articles/driving-eyesight-requirements or call **0300 200 7861**.

You can also speak to your GP, specialist or Parkinson's nurse for advice.

Glaucoma and Parkinson's drugs

Glaucoma is a type of eye disease that damages the optic nerve. If left untreated it can lead to loss of sight.

If you have glaucoma, you might have problems with some Parkinson's medications, such as anticholinergic drugs and levodopa. So you must tell your specialist or Parkinson's nurse if you have this condition.

'Open-angle' glaucoma is the most common type of glaucoma. If you have open-angle glaucoma there may be risks when using anticholinergic drugs.

Where there is no other option but to take anticholinergic drugs, your ophthalmologist or Parkinson's specialist can discuss the advantages and disadvantages of taking them with you.

For people with the less common 'closed-angle' glaucoma, anticholinergic drugs are not

recommended and levodopa (co-beneldopa and co-careldopa) should be used with caution.

Some dopamine agonists can have side effects that affect the eyes. The dopamine agonist rotigotine is not recommended for people who have closed-angle glaucoma.

It's helpful if your Parkinson's specialist and ophthalmologist can work together when prescribing your medication if you have glaucoma.

More information and support

Look after your eyes

This website has been set up for the general public by the College of Optometrists. They've developed a set of patient information leaflets to give straightforward advice about some common eye problems. You can also search for optometrists in your local area.

www.lookafteryoureyes.org

College of Optometrists

The professional, scientific and examining body for optometry in the United Kingdom.

020 7839 6000

www.college-optometrists.org

Royal College of Ophthalmologists

An independent professional body that sets the standards and examinations for medical doctors aiming to become ophthalmologists, and provides surgical skills training.

020 7935 0702

www.rcophth.ac.uk

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 act as a liaison between other health and social care professionals to make sure your needs are met.

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

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 Parkinson's on our online discussion forum.

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Thank you

Thank you to everyone who contributed to or reviewed this information, including experts and people affected by Parkinson's.

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**



Eyes and Parkinson's (FS27/2020)

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

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: PKFS27

Last updated February 2020. 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