

# Occupational therapy and Parkinson's

**O**ccupational therapy can help people to continue performing daily tasks and manage different symptoms.

**This information explains how occupational therapy can help people with Parkinson's in a variety of settings and where you can find a therapist.**

## How can occupational therapy help you?

If you have Parkinson's, you may find it more difficult to do some of the everyday tasks and activities that you used to do easily.

Guidelines say that people with the condition should see an occupational therapist who has experience of working with people with Parkinson's soon after being diagnosed. They understand that being able to perform daily activities can be crucial to your health and sense of wellbeing and can:

- show you different ways to do a difficult task more easily, or give you advice about using strategies, techniques, gadgets, or equipment and new technologies where you need them.
- recommend practical changes, such as rearranging your furniture at home to make it easier to move around an awkward area.
- suggest 'cues' that may help you perform activities and complete tasks more easily. A cue is a way to help someone complete a task by offering them a prompt.
- help you develop strategies to cope with tasks that may become a problem in the future.
- help you make choices by providing information on the various resources, services and benefits that are available to help you maintain family life, work and leisure interests.

- make referrals to other services and organisations that offer treatment, support or help. They can also provide contact details and information so that you and your family or friends can get in touch when you want to.
- give you advice about issues such as driving and accessing other forms of transport, or how to get practical help to allow you to keep meeting work or family commitments. They can also tell you how to apply for a Blue Badge parking permit.

**Find out more:** [see our information on driving and Parkinson's and help with getting around.](#)

## Help with Parkinson's symptoms

### Tremor

If you have a tremor, this can affect everyday tasks, such as buttoning a shirt or applying make up.

An occupational therapist can advise you on different ways to manage your tremor. They may also suggest exercises to help improve your hand function.

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

### Fatigue

You might experience fatigue with Parkinson's, and get physically and mentally tired more quickly. Your occupational therapist may ask you to keep a diary. This is so you can record what tasks make you tired and if there are times of the day when you feel more tired. They can help you plan, pace yourself and get gentle exercise and rest throughout the day. They can also suggest ways of putting a good sleep routine in place.

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

### Communication

People with Parkinson's can experience problems with communication, including changes in handwriting. Occupational therapists can give you strategies to help with this, including avoiding distractions while you are writing, or paying attention to each letter you form as you write.

They can also support you to start or continue using a computer and other technology to help you handle day-to-day correspondence or suggest organisations that can provide training.

**Find out more:** [see our information on communication and speech problems and getting the most out of being online.](#)

### Anxiety

If you have Parkinson's, you may experience anxiety. This might be due to changes in chemicals in the brain, which control and regulate your mood, or because of concerns you have about living with a long-term condition. For example, it may stop you joining in with activities because you are worried about falling, or eating and drinking in public.

Some people with Parkinson's experience 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'.

An occupational therapist may be able to help you find strategies to deal with anxiety. They can also refer you to a mental health specialist if necessary.

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

## Finding an occupational therapist

Occupational therapists are employed in a variety of settings. You can usually contact an occupational therapist through your GP, your social services or social work department, or health and social care trust, to see if it is possible to arrange for an occupational therapist to visit you at home.

You can also ask your GP, specialist or Parkinson's nurse to try to refer you to a rehabilitation unit if you need to see other professionals too, such as a physiotherapist or speech and language therapist.

You can also pay for private occupational therapy. To find a private occupational therapist in your area, you can contact the Royal College of Occupational

Therapists. See the 'More information and section' for their contact details.

## Working with an occupational therapist

During your first meeting, an occupational therapist will ask you about your work, home and family life, your roles and responsibilities, and the types of activities that you need or want to do.

They'll ask you what your main priorities are, your usual lifestyle and what may be stopping you from carrying out daily routines. An occupational therapist will also consider the effect of any other health issues on your day-to-day life.

The occupational therapist will work with you to create an action plan. This normally includes goals you want to achieve over a number of sessions. A friend, family member or carer can be involved in sessions if you wish. Sessions can take place in your home, outside or at your place of work.

If needed, sessions can be used to help you choose and organise equipment or adaptations for your home or place of work. They can also be used to practise a specific technique, such as getting on and off your bed.

## Occupational therapy in the workplace

If your treatment is carefully managed and you have plenty of support, it's possible to continue working when you have Parkinson's for many years, depending on the type of job you have and how your symptoms progress.

If you are finding practical tasks difficult at work, an occupational therapist can do a workplace assessment and suggest reasonable adjustments to help you carry on working. They can also talk to your employer about their responsibilities and act as a link between you, your employer and other services, who may be able to help. Your employer might have their own occupational health service you can use.

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

## Choosing equipment

You should not buy any equipment, such as reclining chairs or mobility scooters, without speaking to your occupational therapist first, even if the person selling the equipment claims to understand the needs of people with Parkinson's.

If an occupational therapist thinks you could benefit from using a piece of equipment, they may be able to provide basic items on loan, free of charge. Independent information and advice on choosing equipment is also available from the Disabled Living Foundation. See the 'More information and support' section for their contact details.

You might be able to get a wheelchair from the NHS or health and social care service. An occupational therapist can refer you to the relevant service in your area for an assessment.

**Find out more:** see our information on daily living equipment for people with Parkinson's.

## Help with funding for adaptations

Occupational therapists can advise and help arrange funding for minor home adaptations if you need them, such as fitting grab rails or hand rails by steps and stairs.

If you need advice about more expensive home adaptations, such as stairlifts, or accessible bathing facilities, you should speak to an occupational therapist based in a social services department, or the health and social care services of a local authority. They may advise you on any funding available. However, major home adaptations, such as installing a level-floor shower (wet room) are often subject to means testing.

For more information about possible grant funding for major adaptations, see [www.gov.uk/disabled-facilities-grants](http://www.gov.uk/disabled-facilities-grants)

**Find out more:** see our information on daily living equipment.

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## More information and support

### Disabled Living Foundation

0300 999 0004  
helpline@dlf.org.uk  
www.dlf.org.uk

### Royal College of Occupational Therapists

020 3141 4600  
hello@rcot.co.uk  
www.rcot.co.uk

### 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.

### 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**

## 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/orderingresources** 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**



## Occupational therapy and Parkinson's (FS97/2020)

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: PKFS97

Last updated March 2020. We review all 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](https://www.parkinsons.org.uk/termsandconditions)