

# Tremor and Parkinson's

**T**remor is common in Parkinson's. Although not everyone with the condition will have this symptom, tremor is one of the three symptoms most often associated with Parkinson's (along with rigidity and slowness of movement).

This information explains what a Parkinson's tremor is, how it is different from other types of tremor, and what can be done to manage this symptom.

## What is a tremor?

Tremor is an uncontrollable rhythmic movement affecting a part of the body, such as the hand or leg. Tremor is not just a symptom of Parkinson's. It can be caused by other conditions, such as 'essential tremor' which is usually harmless and experienced as trembling hands, most noticeable when moving.

Another common type of tremor is 'dystonic tremor', which can affect parts of the body such as the hands, head or voice. It's accompanied by features of 'dystonia', which is a condition that causes muscle contractions and can be painful. Dystonic tremor can be difficult to tell apart from Parkinson's tremor.

**Find out more:** [see our information on dystonia.](#)

## What is a Parkinson's tremor?

A tremor caused by Parkinson's can appear in two ways. It can appear as a:

- **Resting tremor**

This is the most common and it happens when your body is relaxed, such as when you're lying in bed. It most often appears as a 'pill-rolling' tremor. This is because it looks like you're trying to roll a pill between your thumb and index finger.

- **Action tremor**

This type is less common in Parkinson's. It happens 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 a Parkinson's tremor or an essential tremor.

Sometimes, further tests may be helpful, such as having a brain scan called a DaTSCAN.

If you're experiencing tremor and need a referral to a specialist, your GP can refer you.

## What causes a Parkinson's tremor?

People with Parkinson's don't have enough of a chemical called dopamine. This is because Parkinson's causes the brain cells that produce dopamine to become damaged. Without enough dopamine, the symptoms of Parkinson's appear, which can include tremor.

For some people, a tremor is the first symptom of Parkinson's they notice. But not everyone with Parkinson's experiences the same symptoms, and not everyone with the condition develops a tremor.

## If I have Parkinson's, will I eventually get a tremor?

It's not possible to predict whether or not you will develop a tremor, as Parkinson's symptoms vary from person to person.

If you do get a tremor, speak to your GP or specialist about the change in your symptoms. You can also speak to your Parkinson's nurse.

## 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. But this is generally quite a slow process that happens over several years.

For many people with Parkinson's, tremor isn't constant but it comes and goes.

Typically, it starts in one hand before 'spreading' to 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 somewhere else, such as in one foot. Then it may spread up the

leg and to the arm. After several years, the tremor can spread to affect the other side of the body too.

In severe cases, the tremor can affect other parts of the body, including the lips or jaw.

Some people experience what is known as 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 typical 'external' Parkinson's tremor that you can see.

Some people develop what is called 'tremor-dominant' Parkinson's. This is where a tremor becomes the main symptom that needs managing.

People with tremor-dominant Parkinson's usually experience fewer falls and problems with mobility in the long term, compared to people who do not experience a tremor.

If you have a tremor and it gets worse, make sure you 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.

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 can also make your tremor more noticeable.

It's 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 drugs, so if you have any concerns about your medication, 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. Speak to your specialist or Parkinson's nurse for advice.

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.

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

### Medication

Some people find that their Parkinson's drugs can help with tremor. This includes levodopa (sometimes known by brand names including Sinemet and Madopar) and some dopamine agonists.

**Find out more:** [see our information on drug treatments for Parkinson's.](#)

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 often 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 with Parkinson's have also found that complementary therapies, such as aromatherapy, yoga, reflexology and music and art therapy, have helped them to relax.

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

### Deep brain stimulation

Deep brain stimulation involves passing small electrical currents through electrodes that are permanently implanted in the brain.

It requires an operation to implant the electrodes precisely in the right location on one or both sides of the brain.

Deep brain stimulation can help control many of the symptoms of Parkinson's, and can be particularly useful for patients with tremor who are unable to get relief using medications.

Deep brain stimulation isn't a suitable option for everyone and, like any surgery, there can be risks involved with the operation, and people need to be assessed in detail to ensure these risks are acceptably small.

You may only be offered deep brain stimulation if your symptoms are severe and medical treatment is not sufficiently effective.

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

## More information and support

### The National Tremor Foundation

This charity provides information and support to people with any form of tremor.

**01708 386 399**

**enquiries@tremor.co.uk**

**www.tremor.org.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 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](https://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 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.

Our website **[parkinsons.org.uk](https://parkinsons.org.uk)** has a lot of information about Parkinson's and everyday life with the condition.

You can also visit **[parkinsons.org.uk/forum](https://parkinsons.org.uk/forum)** to speak with other people in a similar situation on our online discussion forum.

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## Thank you

Thank you to everyone who contributed to or reviewed this information sheet, 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](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)**



## Tremor and Parkinson's (INFOS0038/2020)

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](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](http://www.ngts.org.uk)

[hello@parkinsons.org.uk](mailto:hello@parkinsons.org.uk)  
[parkinsons.org.uk](http://parkinsons.org.uk)

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Last updated in June 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](http://parkinsons.org.uk/termsandconditions)