

# Tremor and Parkinson's

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## Symptoms

Find out more about a  
Parkinson's tremor and  
how to manage it



# Tremor and Parkinson's

Tremor 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's 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 patient 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 rolling or squeezing a ball, pen or similar object.

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

## Medications

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.

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.

**Find out more:** see our information on drug treatments for Parkinson's.

## 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 yoga, aromatherapy, 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. 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 have specialist experience and knowledge of Parkinson's. They can:

- support people coming to terms with their Parkinson's diagnosis
- help people to manage their medication, so they get the best results and fewer side effects
- make referrals to other professionals such as speech and language therapists and physiotherapists

Some nurses are based in the community, such as your GP surgery. Others are based in hospital settings and clinics.

Talk to your GP or specialist for more details on speaking to a Parkinson's nurse.

### Parkinson's UK information and support

Whatever your journey with Parkinson's, you're not alone.

From the moment you or someone you care about is diagnosed, we have information and support for you.

**Speak to one of our friendly expert advisers, including specialist Parkinson's nurses, care advisers, and benefits and employment advisers.** We've got information and advice on all aspects of living with Parkinson's.

**Get help managing your diagnosis.** Our information packs, webinars, courses and support groups can help you and your loved ones understand your Parkinson's diagnosis and better manage your symptoms.

**Read our up to date, reliable health information.** Our website, booklets and magazines can help you better understand Parkinson's. They're full of tips and advice on managing your condition and supporting a loved one.

**Find ways to get active, stay active and live well with Parkinson's.** Whatever your fitness level, we'll help you find the right activities for you.

**Connect with other people with Parkinson's, families, friends and carers.** Across the UK, in your local area or online. We'll help you meet others who understand what you're going through, because they're going through it too.

### **Find out more**

- Call our helpline on **0808 800 0303** or email **hello@parkinsons.org.uk** to speak to an expert adviser.
- Visit **parkinsons.org.uk/information-and-support** to read our information or find support that's local to you.
- Call **0330 124 3250** or visit **parkinsons.org.uk/order-print-booklets** to order free printed information.

### **Thank you**

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

Thanks also to our information review group and other people affected by Parkinson's who provided feedback.

### **Feedback**

If you have any comments or feedback about our information, please call **0800 138 6593**, email **feedback@parkinsons.org.uk**, or write to us at Parkinson's UK, 50 Broadway, London, SW1H 0BL.

If you'd like to find out more about how we put our information together, or be part of the team that reviews our health content, please contact us at **healthcontent@parkinsons.org.uk** or visit our website at **parkinsons.org.uk/health-content**.

### **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 Care team on **0800 138 6593** or visit our website at **parkinsons.org.uk/donate**.

Thank you.



We're Parkinson's UK,  
the charity that's  
here to support every  
Parkinson's journey.  
Every step of the way.

Free confidential helpline **0808 800 0303**  
Monday to Friday 9am to 6pm,  
Saturday 10am to 2pm (interpreting available)  
Relay UK **18001 0808 800 0303** (for textphone users only)  
**hello@parkinsons.org.uk | parkinsons.org.uk**

Parkinson's UK, 50 Broadway, London SW1H 0DB



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