

Time Critical Medication

**How to support people with
Parkinson's: a factsheet for
the Ambulance Service**



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Parkinson's medication is time critical







Patients with Parkinson's are at risk of significant harm if they don't get their medication on time, every time. The Ambulance Service has a key role to play in making this happen.

'On time' means within 30 minutes of the patient's prescribed time. Even short delays can worsen symptoms such as rigidity, pain and tremors, increasing the risk of falls. Delays can also cause stress, anxiety and issues with swallowing, increasing the risk of aspiration.

Over half of people with Parkinson's don't get their medications on time, every time in hospital. This leads to worse patient outcomes, longer recovery times and increased costs to the NHS.

What should I do if my patient has Parkinson's?

For people with Parkinson's being treated at home or being transported by ambulance to hospital, it's really important to:

-  **Check if medication is due** – A typical person with Parkinson's takes different types of medication, several times a day. The timing will vary for each person. Medication can be disrupted when someone is unwell or has had an accident. Always check when the person last took their Parkinson's medication and when the next dose is due. If they've missed a dose, work with the patient to rectify this.
-  **Bring the patient's Parkinson's medication** – Preferably in its packaging and with a prescription if possible, to go with the person to hospital.
-  **Seek additional help** – If the person with Parkinson's is disorientated or their cognition appears to be affected, ask any carer or family member present about the person's medication norms. If possible, allow the carer or family member to accompany the person on the journey to hospital.
-  **Allow time if the person freezes** – Sometimes people with Parkinson's can get 'stuck' and not be able to move their feet. They may need some time to get going again. Counting out loud or asking them to try 'marching on the spot' can help them get moving.
-  **Prompt further medication doses** – If there are delays in admission to hospital, remind the person to take their medication whenever it's due. Give any help they need, such as water to take their dose.
-  **Ensure adequate handover** – Make sure the receiving hospital admissions staff know about the person's Parkinson's and include information on their Parkinson's medication status in your handover.

What is Parkinson's?

Parkinson's is a complex neurological condition that can affect all aspects of daily life. Every person's symptoms are different.

While the majority of people with Parkinson's develop symptoms after the age of 65, thousands of working-age people in the UK are also affected.

People with Parkinson's often find it hard to move freely and may 'freeze'. People describe this as feeling like their feet are 'glued' to the ground. They may also have other issues including anxiety, depression, dementia, hallucinations, pain and continence problems. Parkinson's can also affect talking, swallowing and writing.

The severity of symptoms can fluctuate from day to day and people can even experience rapid changes over the course of the day.

The longer people live with Parkinson's, the higher the risk of hospital admissions. People with Parkinson's are commonly admitted to hospital after a fall or because they have an acute infection.

In 2022-23, there were at least 78,500 recorded emergency admissions for people with Parkinson's in the UK.*

* Please note that this figure excludes emergency admissions in Northern Ireland because the data is not available.

About this guide

This guide has been developed by health professionals in the ambulance services of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales in collaboration with the Parkinson's UK Excellence Network. It aims to support ambulance service staff to make sure people with Parkinson's get their medication on time, every time.

It is based on a guide originally developed in 2023 by healthcare professionals in the Scottish Ambulance Service, working with the Parkinson's UK Excellence Network.

This guide was last reviewed in January 2025.

Please visit the Excellence Network website to check for revisions and updates.

To find out about time critical medications and Parkinson's visit **parkinsons.org.uk/time-critical-medication-resources**

For more information about Parkinson's, visit **parkinsons.org.uk** or call our helpline on **0808 800 0303**

