

OVERVIEW OF PARKINSON'S DISEASE

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What is Parkinson's disease?

Parkinson's disease is caused by the death of certain nerve cells in the brain. These nerve cells produce a substance called dopamine, which is therefore lacking in Parkinson's disease. Dopamine is a chemical that is responsible for the normal working of the part of the brain that controls movement. The dopamine deficiency leads to the symptoms of the disease.

Main Symptoms of Parkinson's Disease

- Tremor (shaking) at rest
- Slowness of movement
- Stiffness of the limbs and body
- Impaired balance

What Causes Parkinson's Disease?

The cause of Parkinson's disease is not yet known. Both genetic and environmental factors may be involved. The disease worsens with time. There is no cure for Parkinson's disease, but its symptoms can be treated. Treatments to slow the advance of the disease are also being developed.

Treatment Options

- Medications: There are various medications that can help the symptoms of Parkinson's disease. Your doctor can select and prescribe the medications that will help you the most. A frequently used medication is Sinemet (levodopa/carbidopa) which the brain converts into dopamine to help with movement. Other medications make Sinemet more effective (e.g. Comtan, Azilect). Yet other medications act like dopamine (agonists, e.g. Mirapex, Requip).
- Surgery: As the disease progresses, several surgical treatments may be considered by your doctor.
- Protective Treatments to slow the disease: Under development.
- Gene Therapy: Under development.

DO YOU HAVE THE FOLLOWING SYMPTOMS?

1. Do your arms or legs shake?
2. Do you have trouble getting up from a chair?
3. Is your handwriting smaller than before?
4. Do people tell you that your voice is softer than before?
5. Do you have poor balance when you are walking?
6. Do your feet suddenly freeze (stop moving) while trying to walk?
7. Is your face less expressive than before?
8. Do you have trouble doing-up buttons or using utensils?
9. Do you shuffle your feet and take small steps when you walk?

If you have answered yes to several of these questions, you may wish to discuss this with your doctor and have an examination for Parkinson's disease. Some symptoms may be due to normal aging. Only your doctor will know for sure whether you have Parkinson's disease.

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