

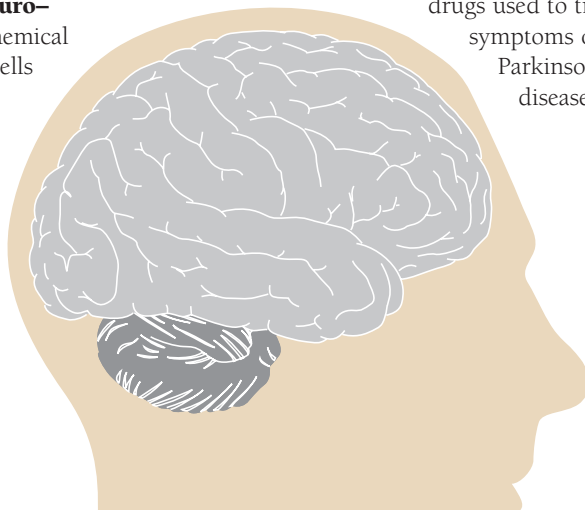
Parkinson Disease

Parkinson disease is a neurological disorder (a disorder that affects the brain and nervous system). The main problem that people with Parkinson disease experience is the inability to easily and effectively control the movement of their bodies.

Parkinson disease is related to a decrease in the production of a certain type of **neuro-transmitter** (a chemical that helps nerve cells communicate) called **dopamine**. Dopamine assists in the communication

of commands from the brain to the muscles to direct and control movement. It is also part of the process of making muscle movement smooth and deliberate, free of shaking or trembling.

An article in the October 18, 2000, issue of *JAMA* discusses the effectiveness of two different drugs used to treat the symptoms of Parkinson disease.



WHAT ARE THE EARLY SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF PARKINSON DISEASE?

- Shaking or trembling
- Having difficulty with normal daily activities (getting up out of a chair or preparing food, for example) because of shakiness or trembling
- Tremors and shaking may become worse when the person is relaxed
- Problems with speech, such as speaking more softly than in the past
- Handwriting changes (becomes smaller and more cramped, for example)
- Problems with movement, such as hands, arms, or legs not moving as smoothly or easily as they have in the past
- May not be able to hold things steadily
- Face may not be as expressive as it has been in the past
- May remain in a certain position for longer than usual without moving

A person with these symptoms should see a doctor for an evaluation.

CAN I INHERIT PARKINSON DISEASE?

No genetic link has been found for most forms of Parkinson disease.

Additional Sources: National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, Parkinson's Disease Foundation, The AMA Family Medical Guide, The AMA Encyclopedia of Medicine

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WHAT ARE SYMPTOMS OF LATER STAGE PARKINSON DISEASE?

While the symptoms below are considered primary symptoms of Parkinson disease, it is important to note that not all persons will experience each and every symptom.

- **Rigidity** – some muscles are tense or contracted when they do not need to be because they are not receiving the correct messages from the brain and nervous system. This causes stiffness and resistance to movement.
- **Tremor** – involuntary shaking, trembling, or movement of body, such as fingers, hands, jaw, or head. Usually appears when body part is at rest and goes away when person makes an intentional movement with that body part.
- **Bradykinesia** – a slowing down of movement and loss of the ability to move automatically and spontaneously. Sometimes it is difficult to perform a movement quickly, which can make it difficult to perform many routine tasks.
- **Postural Instability** – inability to hold a body position, including problems with balance and coordination. The person may lean forward or backward and may fall easily.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke
800 352-9424
www.ninds.nih.gov
- Parkinson's Disease Foundation
800 457-6676 or
www.pdf.org

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