

information

FATIGUE AND PARKINSON'S

Parkinson's is a progressive neurological condition, which is characterised by both motor (movement) and non-motor symptoms.

Fatigue is a common issue affecting people living with Parkinson's. The experience and impact of fatigue can vary greatly. For some people the sense of fatigue can be overwhelming and a dysfunctional force in day to day life.

Often fatigue can induce a cycle of inactivity which leads to decreased muscle strength, reduced cardiovascular function and deteriorating psychological health. Learning to manage fatigue by using energy efficiently can help to overcome this cycle.

Causes of Fatigue

The exact cause of fatigue in Parkinson's can be difficult to determine. In some cases fatigue may be a direct symptom of the condition. Motor symptoms such as tremor, bradykinesia (slowness of movement), muscle stiffness and dyskinesia (involuntary movements) can all contribute to muscle fatigue.

Fatigue may be a side effect of medication, for example, some dopamine agonists are known to contribute to daytime sleepiness. Medication dosing, timing and wearing off are other factors which may contribute to fatigue. Sleep disturbance also contributes to daytime fatigue.

Fatigue may be caused by an entirely unrelated condition or circumstance. It is advisable to consult the GP or treating medical specialist in order to determine the cause of fatigue.

Reducing and Managing Fatigue

Consulting the GP or treating medical specialist is essential. If fatigue is found to be related to Parkinson's and/or the medications then adjusting these may be beneficial.

If the cause of fatigue is not clear it becomes more difficult to treat medically. Lifestyle changes in order to maximize the use of limited energy supplies become more important.

Strategies to Conserve Energy

Plan Ahead

- Equally distribute activities throughout the day or week by writing a schedule or diary
- Consider which activities are the most tiring and plan the best time to do these
- Prioritise daily activities in order to complete the most important at the time of day when most energy is available.
- Coordinate important activities with the medication schedule so that they are completed during 'on' times
- Plan activities before commencing – can the activity be performed in a different way?
- Avoid fatiguing movements such as bending, reaching and lifting
- Share household tasks with others

Pace Yourself

- Allow time to complete activities
- Incorporate time for rest to allow for recharging of energy
- Use 'off' periods as a time of rest
- Divide big activities into smaller more manageable tasks
- Alternate between heavy and light tasks
- Do not ignore feelings of fatigue

For further information contact
your state Parkinson's organisation:
Freecall 1800 644 189 www.parkinsons.org.au

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Use Equipment

- Long handled aids, for example, long handled shoe horn or toe washer can help to prevent high energy postures such as bending and reaching
- Using a shower chair helps to prevent unnecessary wastage of energy from the legs during showering

Exercise and Diet

- Eat a healthy and balanced diet
- Eat foods with a low glycaemic index (low GI) to provide longer lasting energy
- Exercise during 'on' periods
- Exercise is important to build strength and stamina to overcome fatigue

Implementing energy conservation techniques will help manage fatigue and improve quality of life generally. Referral to an occupational therapist may assist with further strategies.

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