

InTouch Newsletter

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Managing constipation in Parkinson's

Constipation is the infrequent passage of hard, dry bowel motions which are difficult to pass.

It is a common problem in Parkinson's and can also predate the Parkinson's diagnosis. Most importantly, constipation can reduce the quality of life for people living with Parkinson's.

Constipation is problematic in Parkinson's due to slow movement of the muscles of the gastro-intestinal tract.

The autonomic nervous system is a complex network of cells that controls the body's internal state. It regulates and supports many different internal processes, often outside of a person's conscious awareness – and it is responsible for the function of smooth muscle in the gastro-intestinal tract.

Constipation occurs due to slowness of the muscles of the bowel moving the food products from the stomach, along the small bowel to the large bowel and onto excretion.

Research shows that Parkinson's can affect the nerves that line the gastro-intestinal tract. At the same time, brain changes that cause stiffness and slowness also affect the muscles in this tract.

That that is why swallowing and the passage of food along the gastro-intestinal tract is slowed down. The slower the transit time, the more water is absorbed from the waste products and the harder the stools become – and the more difficult they are to pass.

There are several reasons why constipation is problematic for a person living with Parkinson's:

- **Medication:** Slow gastric emptying makes it more difficult for the medication to get to the top of the small intestine where it is best absorbed.

Many of the medications which are used to treat Parkinson's can also cause constipation. Antacids used in treating gastric reflux can also increase the risk of constipation.

- **Diet:** Swallowing issues and chewing problems may make it difficult to ensure that a healthy diet is maintained

Measures you can take to manage constipation include:

Hydration: It is essential to maintain a good fluid intake to maintain bowel health. Many people living with Parkinson's try to reduce their fluids so that they do not have to rush to the toilet – but this has real impact on the risk of constipation.

- **Exercise:** It helps to maintain overall health and well being
- **Maintaining regular toileting habits:** Maintain a good routine and do not avoid the urge to open the bowels.

If constipation is left untreated it can lead to many serious problems including:

- **Poor symptom management** of Parkinson's as medications cannot reach the area of the intestine where they are best absorbed
- **Nausea** and a reduction in appetite and fluid intake, increasing the problem.
- **Lethargy** and discomfort, reducing exercise and again increasing the problem
- **Bladder** involvement as the constipated bowel can place pressure on the bladder causing urinary incontinence. It can also prevent complete bladder emptying and this raises the risk of the development of a urinary tract infection.
- **Bowel obstruction** is the worst-case scenario. A bowel obstruction is a medical emergency and must be treated as such or it could prove fatal.

Here are four steps to preventing and managing constipation:

1. **Eat Well**

A healthy diet rich in dietary fibre can be attained by eating fruit, vegetables, grains, legumes, nuts, and seeds.

2. **Drink sufficient fluids**

Drink 1.5 - 2 litres daily. The best fluid is water. It is best to limit hour intake of alcohol, energy drinks, tea, coffee, and fizzy drinks (they are high in caffeine and act as bladder irritants).

3. **Exercise regularly**

Exercise for 30 minutes per day as it plays a significant role in managing constipation. Varied exercise is best, but walking is great.

4. **Practice good toileting habits**

Go to the toilet as soon as you feel the urge as this is the most effective time to empty the bowel. Sit on the toilet with your elbows on knees, leaning forward and supporting your feet. Relax your tummy, breathe naturally, and draw up your anal muscles when your bowel action is complete.

Laxatives help to soften the stools, making them easier to pass. They are not the first step in managing constipation but are very important – particularly for people with living with Parkinson's for whom constipation can be very problematic.

Coloxyl, Movicol, Senekot, and Agarol are useful laxatives and can be used on a regular basis to manage constipation. Warm drinks in the morning and prune juice can also aid in the management of constipation.

While constipation is common in people living with Parkinson's it should be never be ignored or dismissed as a trivial problem. Good bowel management is necessary for quality of life and needs to be well managed every single day.

If you have questions about constipation, call our Infoline on **1800 644 189**.

Mediterranean diet could delay Parkinson's disease onset

Eating a Mediterranean diet is linked to later onset of Parkinson's Disease, a [study](#) by researchers at the University of British Columbia, Canada, has found.

According to the research, following a Mediterranean-style diet could delay Parkinson's disease by up to 17.4 years for women, and 8.4 years for men.

The researchers studied two diets – the Mediterranean and MIND diets. They are similar, with both focusing on vegetables, pulses, seafood, olive oil, and wine in moderation.

Both diets also encourage minimal consumption of processed and fried foods, red meat, refined grains, added sugars, and saturated fats.

There are small differences between the two. The MIND diet (which is based on the Mediterranean and [DASH diets](#)) emphasises green leafy vegetables, berries, beans, whole grains, and poultry. It also discourages fruit, milk, and potatoes.

The researchers found that women reaped the most benefits from the MIND diet while the Mediterranean diet had a greater positive effect on men.

The study assessed 286 Canadian participants in total, 167 of whom had Parkinson's onset (i.e., the first symptoms appearing) in the previous 12 years, and 119 were a control group.

Of those with Parkinson's, 68 percent were men – compared to 39 percent in the control group. However, men are 1.5 times more likely to have the disease than women, according to [Parkinsons.org](#).

Adherence to the MIND or Mediterranean diet was assessed for each participant – also considering other health markers, such as exercise, smoking, and diabetes.

The researchers found a correlation between MIND diet adherence and later onset of Parkinson's, particularly for women.

Females who followed the MIND diet the closest were found to have Parkinson's onset 17.4 years later than those whose adherence was lowest.

"The study shows individuals with Parkinson's disease have a significantly later age of onset if their eating pattern closely aligns with the Mediterranean-type diet. The difference shown in the study was up to 17 years later in women and eight years later in men," said Dr. Silke Appel-Cresswell of the Pacific Parkinson's Research Centre, the Djavad Mowafaghian Centre for Brain Health, and the Division of Neurology in the University of British Columbia Faculty of Medicine.

"There is a lack of medications to prevent or delay Parkinson's disease, yet we are optimistic that this new evidence suggests nutrition could potentially delay onset of the disease," she said.

The MIND diet was originally designed to minimise cognitive decline, and [it has been linked to the prevention of Alzheimer's disease](#) and dementia in the past, but the new study is the first research into the effect of the MIND diet on those with Parkinson's disease.

However, the research supports [a previous study](#) that found that the MIND diet could reduce incidence and delay progression of Parkinson's disease.

Sources

Business Insider Australia

Faculty of Medicine, University of British Columbia, Canada

Parkinsons.org

6th World Parkinson Congress – Barcelona 2022

The 5th World Parkinson Congress (WPC) was held in Kyoto, Japan, in June 2019.

Now planning is underway for the 6th Parkinson Congress to be held in Barcelona, Spain from June 7 to 10, 2022.

That sounds like a long time away, but it's not too early to save those dates in your calendar.

Sandra Elms from Newcastle Support Group is one of 15 Ambassadors appointed from around the globe for the WPC 2022.

"Unlike many conferences which discuss Parkinson's disease, but do not encourage people with Parkinson's to attend, the WPC is open to everyone. I would strongly encourage you to go," said Sandra.

Want to register your interest (without incurring cost or making a commitment) to attend WPC 2022 in Barcelona?

Phone Sarah Swarbrick at Parkinson's NSW on 8051 1900 or email sarah.swarbrick@parkinsonsnsw.org.au

Meet our Staff Member

Rebecca Manners, Parkinson's Specialist Nurse

Rebecca Manners joined Parkinson's NSW as a Parkinson's Specialist Nurse February of this year. She is based in Ballina and supports the Tweed, Byron, and Ballina communities of the Northern New South Wales Local Health District (LHD).

Her position in Ballina is funded 50/50 by Parkinson's NSW and the LHD.

Prior to joining Parkinson's NSW, Rebecca was the Movement Disorder Nurse Specialist at Auckland Hospital. Her 16 years of nursing experience also includes General, Surgical, and Orthopedics roles in addition to Neurology.

She has also worked for STADA Pharmaceuticals as a Nurse Advisor, managing the apomorphine nursing service.

Although she's New Zealand-born, Rebecca is no stranger to Australia. She has worked two stints as a Remote Area Nurse in NSW and Western Australia.

Rebecca is delighted to be back by the water in her new role, though, since she grew by the beach in New Zealand.

She enjoys swimming as well as yoga and Pilates. Rebecca is also a keen hiker and has enjoyed trekking in Nepal.

"I'm really delighted to be in this new role in Ballina," said Rebecca. "It is a beautiful part of the world and my LHD colleagues and the local community have been extremely welcoming."

Results of Zoom meetings survey now in

During February and March, Parkinson's NSW conducted a survey of Zoom online meeting participants to obtain feedback on desired topics and any areas for improvement.

The results are now in and are summarised below.

Requested topics for future Zoom meetings

- My Aged Care – how to apply and access the online system.
- Stages of Parkinson's
- The real-world experience of living with Parkinson's.
- New medications for Parkinson's
- Research updates
- Mental health aspects of Parkinson's
- Advice on voice amplifiers that are chargeable.

- Freezing of gait
- Carer frustrations with service providers who do not understand Parkinson's symptoms and do not listen.
- A guest speaker to talk about Advanced Care Plans and Wills (which is sometimes difficult to broach in small groups)
- Older people with more advanced Parkinson's
- Gut challenges and how to overcome them.
- Speech pathology for Parkinson's
- Diet for Parkinson's

Other comments and areas for improvement

- Please provide two weeks' notice of meetings, then a reminder one week ahead.
- Sitting for a long time is difficult.
- Technology issues make it difficult to participate.
- Meetings often conflict with my medical appointments.
- Would be beneficial if we could view meetings together as a Support Group.
- Guest speakers are invaluable.
- Good to hear other people's strategies for dealing with Parkinson's.

The future of Zoom meetings

Once a supplement for face-to-face meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic, Zoom online meetings have become a valued resource for many Support Groups.

They are a unique and useful way of gaining access to new resources – particularly advice from Parkinson's Registered Nurses, Parkinson's Specialist Nurses and experts from other organisations with knowledge of issues which are also related to Parkinson's e.g. continence, carer stress, exercise, medications, legal matters, etc.

Therefore, Parkinson's NSW will continue to deliver Zoom meetings according to schedules published in advance, in this newsletter. Zoom schedules are also on the Parkinson's NSW web site.

For all online meeting (Zoom) details please go to:
<https://www.parkinsonsnsw.org.au/online-meetings-for-support-groups>