

DOCTORnow Blog Presents:



Not just a tremor

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It is **Parkinson's awareness week** this April and the charity is keen to increase awareness of the disease. Parkinson's disease can happen to anyone. It affects 1 in 500 people – that's just short of **130,000 people in the UK**, and up to 14 million people worldwide. The disease has gained more public awareness with the actor Michael J. Fox, Olympic cyclist Davis Phinney, and late professional boxer Muhammad Ali all discussing the condition.

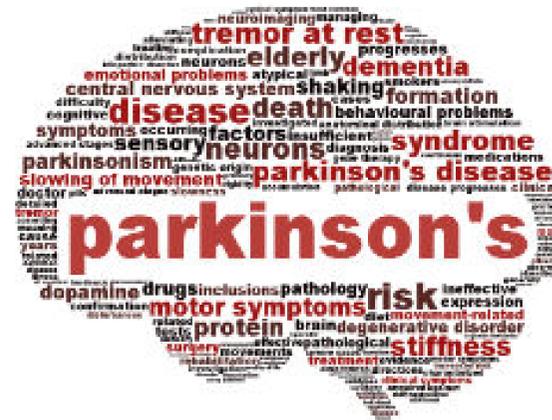
The English doctor James Parkinson in 1817 first documented the characteristic symptoms of the disease. The three main symptoms are:

1. **Tremor** – shaking, which usually begins in the hand or arm and is more likely to occur when the limb is relaxed and resting.
2. **Slowness of movement** (bradykinesia) – where physical movements are much slower than normal, which can make everyday tasks difficult and can result in a distinctive slow, shuffling walk with very small steps.

3. **Muscle stiffness** (rigidity) – stiffness and tension in the muscles, which can make it difficult to move around and make facial expressions, and can result in painful muscle cramps (dystonia).

Parkinson's disease also causes a lot of **varied physical symptoms** such as balance problems, loss of sexual function, intermittent nerve pain, urination problems and dizziness. Thinking and behavioural problems may also occur. Dementia becomes common in the advanced stages of the disease. Depression and anxiety are also common occurring in more than a third of people with PD. Other symptoms include sensory, sleep, and emotional problems.

Sadly at the moment we do not know the cause of the disease. It is thought physical symptoms of the disease result from the death of cells in the **substantia nigra**, a region of the midbrain. This results in not enough dopamine in these areas. Why the cells die in the first place is still poorly understood.



Picture ref: globalhealingcenter.com

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Therefore initial treatment is typically:

- **Medication** - such as levodopa, dopamine agonists, monoamine, oxidase-B inhibitors
- **Supportive therapies** – such as physiotherapy, speech and language therapy and dietary advice
- **Surgery** - to place microelectrodes for deep brain stimulation has been used to reduce motor symptoms in severe cases where drugs are ineffective

It is important to get **early diagnosis** for the disease so that an individual care plan can be made, work adjustments, finances, and care agencies can support you.

PARKINSON'S^{UK}
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For further information Parkinson's UK is the main Parkinson's support and research charity in the UK. They can offer the support and advice you may need if you're living with Parkinson's disease, and can let you know about support groups in your local area.

They can be contacted by a free confidential helpline on 0808 800 0303 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 7pm, and 10am to 2pm on Saturdays) or email: hello@parkinsons.org.uk