

All you need to know about living with Parkinson's disease

It is estimated that in the UK about 12,700 people are living with Parkinson's disease, with the condition affecting about one in 500 people.

Dr Anirban Roy, local GP and NHS Heywood, Middleton and Rochdale Clinical Commissioning Group's (HMR CCG) mental health lead, describes the symptoms of Parkinson's disease and explains what you can do if you or someone close to you experiences these symptoms.

What are the symptoms of Parkinson's disease?

Most people with Parkinson's will begin to develop symptoms by the age of 50, although it is possible that people as young as 40 will experience some symptoms. It's also been proven that men are more likely to be affected than women.

The four main symptoms of Parkinson's are:

- Trembling in hands, arms, legs, jaw and face
- Stiffness of the limbs
- Slowness of movement
- Impaired balance and coordination

The early symptoms are often subtle and the rate of progression of the condition varies from one person to another. As the disease progresses, the symptoms may interfere with daily activities.

These can cause additional symptoms, such as, difficulty in swallowing, chewing, and speaking; urinary problems or constipation; skin problems; sleep disruptions; and depression and other emotional changes.

Is Parkinson's disease preventable, and are there any risk factors associated with the disease?

Unfortunately, Parkinson's is not preventable. However, some studies have shown that people who eat a Mediterranean diet, which is high in fibre, rich in fruits and vegetables, fish, and omega-3 rich oils, may have some protection against Parkinson's.

What should I do if I think someone close to me presents Parkinson's disease symptoms and hasn't yet been diagnosed?

If you, or someone close to you, present the symptoms of Parkinson's, visit your GP as soon as possible. Early diagnosis is important as it means treatment can be initiated early on which can help the patient lead an independent and active life.

A diagnosis of Parkinson's will also rule out other illnesses which can cause similar symptoms. These include:

- Side effects of certain drugs
- Vascular Parkinsonism – this can happen after a stroke or in patients with diabetes
- Some types of dementia

- Some types of very rare cancers

After diagnosis, what can be done to help the person living with Parkinson's disease?

Following a diagnosis of Parkinson's, patients need to work closely with their doctor to find a treatment plan which offers the greatest relief from symptoms, with the fewest side effects.

Parkinson's is incurable but there is so much that can be done to allow a person to live an independent and active lifestyle. The symptoms vary from one person to the next and so doctors choose from a variety of treatment available to best suit the patient's need.

The main treatments available are:

- Medications
- Therapies like physiotherapy and occupational therapy
- Dieticians and counsellors can also provide support
- Neurosurgery— although this only helps a small number of patients and there are strict criteria for patient selection

Above all, it is extremely important to eat healthily and exercise to maintain physical and mental wellbeing. Exercise, such as aerobics, will help to stretch various muscles and improve balance and coordination which helps to control the symptoms.

What support is available locally?

Parkinson's UK is the main organisation providing support to people living with Parkinson's disease. They can be contacted on their free helpline on 0808 800 0303 or email hello@parkinsons.org.uk.

Age UK, a charitable organisation providing support for elderly people, also provides support for people living with the condition. Contact 0800 169 6565 or visit their website at www.ageuk.org.uk.

If you are looking after someone with Parkinson's and you would like to access support, speak to your GP about registering as a carer. By registering, you can receive help and advice, and tap into the various resources available to carers, such as, the Rochdale Carer's Resource. Book an appointment with them by phoning 01706 925808.

What benefits are available to people living with Parkinson's disease and their carers?

There are a number of benefits available to people living with Parkinson's and their carers.

People living with Parkinson's sometimes struggle to manage day-to-day activities, such as climbing stairs or going out safely. If this sounds familiar to you, contact Rochdale Borough Council's adult social care service for an assessment of your needs. Following an assessment, the social care team can identify any changes or equipment needed to make your home safer and allow the patient to lead an independent lifestyle.

For more information, contact Rochdale Borough Council adult social care, on 0300 303 8886, Monday to Friday, 8.30am-4.45pm. For out-of-hours enquiries, call 0300 303 8875.

Other benefits you may be entitled to could include financial support. Book an appointment with the Citizens Advice Bureau to find out more. Call 0844 847 2638 or visit www.gov.uk.