

# Understanding Parkinson's Disease: Misconceptions, Reality and Facts



There are many myths and misconceptions about Parkinson's disease (PD) and its treatments. Knowing what is fact or fiction can help optimize care and quality of life.

**Misconception: Parkinson's ONLY affects movement, causing motor symptoms like tremor, stiffness and slowness.**

- **Reality:** Non-movement symptoms in Parkinson's are quite common and include sleep issues, constipation, bladder symptoms, fatigue, pain, tingling, lightheadedness, cognitive difficulty, anxiety and depression.
- **Fact:** Many movement and non-movement symptoms of Parkinson's are highly treatable.

**Misconception: You can judge how severe a person's Parkinson's is based on a single observation.**

- **Reality:** PD symptoms can fluctuate and not all symptoms are visible.
- **Fact:** Many people with Parkinson's can experience ON times (when they feel well and medications are working) and OFF times (when symptoms are problematic and medications are not working). Keeping track of symptoms and when they occur, as well as medication timing, can help the provider optimize medication.

**Misconception: Levodopa stops working after a couple of years.**

- **Reality:** Levodopa can work for decades, but due to the progressive nature of PD, many people need to adjust their dosage over time.
- **Fact:** Levodopa is an effective treatment for Parkinson's and noticeably improves quality of life.

**Misconception: Doctors can predict how PD symptoms will progress.**

- **Reality:** People with PD can experience different progression, symptoms or reactions to treatments, so even the best doctors cannot tell you exactly what lies ahead.
- **Fact:** People with PD can maximize their quality of life with regular exercise, adequate sleep, a nutritious diet and seeking care from a neurologist. Exercise can improve mobility, stamina and mood. Regular neurology care lowers risk of health complications and saves thousands of lives of people living with Parkinson's each year.

**Misconception: People experience Parkinson's "flare-ups."**

- **Reality:** Typically, PD symptoms do not suddenly worsen over days or weeks. If they do, it is critical that the healthcare team investigate the underlying cause. Medication changes, infection, dehydration, sleep deprivation, stress, grief and other medical conditions can greatly impact and worsen PD symptoms.
- **Fact:** Certain medications (prochlorperazine, metoclopramide, valproic acid and others) can worsen PD symptoms. Often, when infection and underlying medical or mental health issues are treated, PD symptoms improve.

**Still have questions?**

Call the Parkinson's Foundation Helpline at 1-800-4PD-INFO (1-800-473-4636) to speak to a PD Information Specialist.