

Parkinson's Disease Dr Vicki Holmes January 26,16 CTV Mid-Life Matters

This is a progressive disorder of the nervous system that affects movement. The causes vary. A very small percent are hereditary due to certain gene variations which appear to increase the risk. Certain toxins or environmental conditions may increase the risk slightly. It is more likely to occur as you get older and it is more frequent in men than women. Unfortunately there are no blood tests or diagnostic imaging tests that confirm Parkinson's, therefore it may take a while to diagnose.

Symptoms begin when the brain's dopamine-producing cells, which send signals to other nerve cells, are destroyed. Lewy bodies form, containing large amounts of a protein called alpha-synuclein, creating plaque in the brain's nerve cells. The symptoms vary and often present gradually.

If you have these symptoms, it is important to see your doctor.

- Walking may become somewhat unsteady, your steps become shorter.
- It may become difficult to get out of a chair.
- Your resting hand may develop a fine, pin-rolling tremor where the thumb and index finger rolling over each other. Hand muscles may become rigid and painful, making handwriting difficult.
- You may lose some automatic movements like blinking, smiling or swinging your arms.
- Speech may become softer, monotone and slurred.
- As the disease progresses there are many more symptoms which you can read about on the recommended web sites I've suggested.

Although this is so far an incurable disease, there are possible treatments that may help control the symptoms. New guidelines issued in 2012 will guide your health care team in providing care.

- One of the best treatments is an active exercise program that focuses on balance and stretching.
- Medications are available to either increase the dopamine in your brain, or act like dopamine, or block the enzyme that breaks dopamine down. Anticholinergics control the tremors.
- Deep Brain Stimulation is a newer surgical technique where electrodes are implanted into parts of the brain. The electrodes are then stimulated by electrical impulses that can diminish the tremors. This can stop the dyskinesias that don't respond to medications.
- A potentially great treatment that is being actively researched all over the world is Stem Cell therapy. It is not yet at the stage where it is readily available but hopefully soon there will be enough research to assess its effectiveness and safety.

The message for today is to **be aware of changes that are occurring in your body**. Don't assume it is simply aging. Get assessed.

Web sites

1. [www.parkinson.ca](http://www.parkinson.ca) (Parkinson Canada's website)
2. [www.Mayoclinic.org](http://www.Mayoclinic.org)
3. [www.Stemcellfoundation.ca](http://www.Stemcellfoundation.ca)