



Parkinson's Disease

Coping With & Managing Advice from Speech & Language Therapists.

Parkinson's Disease is a progressive neurological disorder. It occurs due to a reduced amount of **dopamine** (chemical) in the brain. **Dopamine** is a chemical that helps control movement.

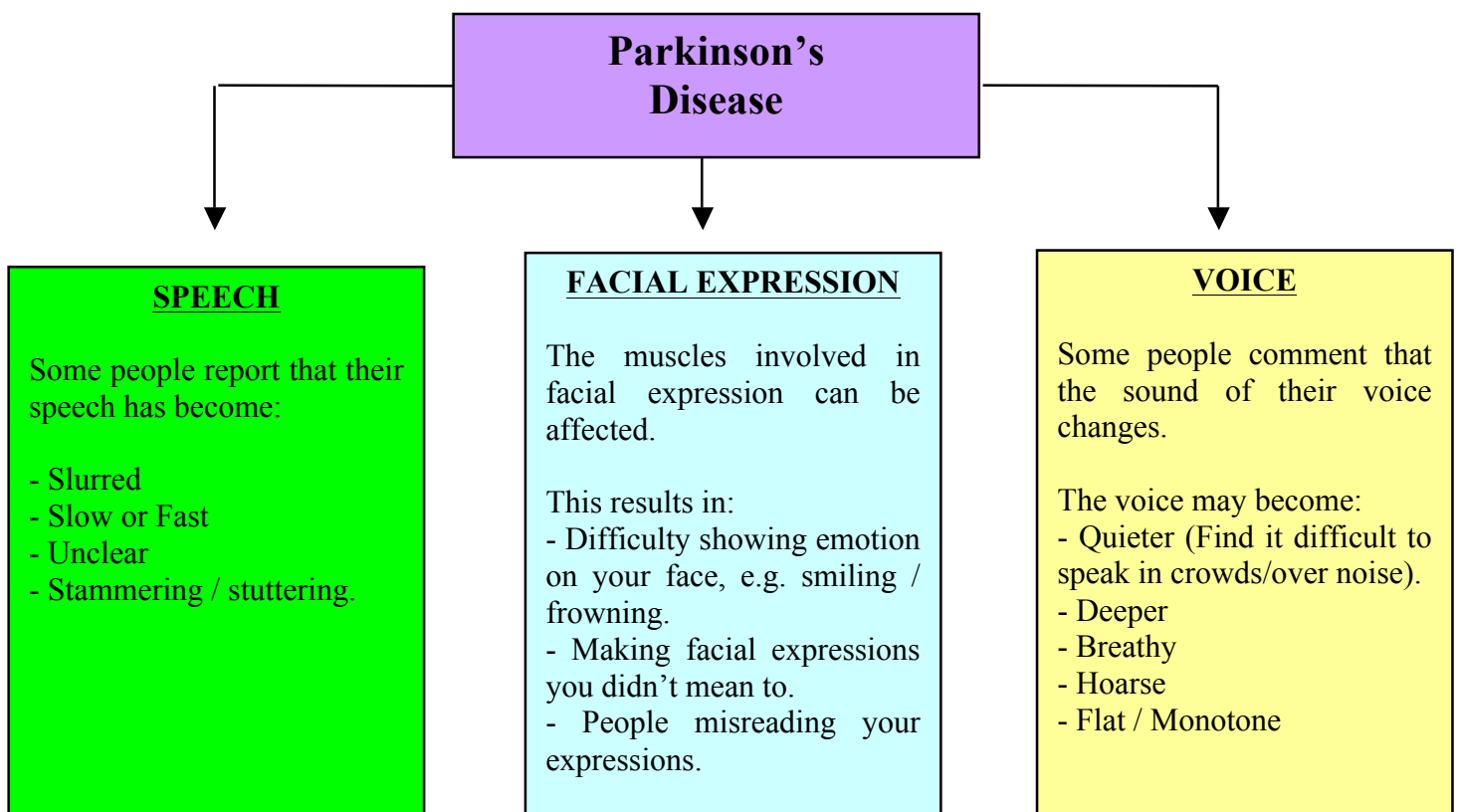
What are the effects of Parkinson's Disease?

The lack of **dopamine** causes certain symptoms. The three most common ones are:

- Tremor; trembling in hands, arms, legs, jaw, and face
- Bradykinesia; slow movement, and difficulty initiating a movement
- Rigidity; stiffness of the limbs and trunk

How can Parkinson's Disease affect communication?

Some people with Parkinson's Disease may notice that they are having difficulty communicating with other people. Parkinson's can affect communication in different ways.



Advice from Speech & Language Therapists

Attending a Speech and Language Therapist for advice about the best strategies for you or your relative/friend with Parkinson's Disease is always advisable.

Here are some general tips/strategies for both the speaker and listener:

i) Strategies to help improve speech/voice

- Speak slowly
- Keep sentences short; Pause and take a breath before starting the next sentence.
- Stress each key word in the sentence; this will help you get the main point of your sentence across.
- Over-pronounce the sounds of words; This will make them sound clearer to your listener.
- Speak Louder; Many people with Parkinson's don't realise they are speaking quietly, so it might be better to feel that you are speaking too loudly than too softly.
- Rest your voice; allow some time to rest your voice throughout the day.

ii) Environmental Strategies (making changes to the environment can also be helpful)

- Sit in a well lit area
- Face your speaker; this will improve the listener's ability to lip-read.
- Keep background noise to a minimum; turn off the TV, turn down the radio.
- Attract your listener's attention before speaking.

iii) Using other ways of communicating

- Writing; If you are able to write, always carry a paper and pen so you can write down what you are trying to say.
- Alphabet Board; If writing is difficult, use an alphabet board to spell words if they are not understood.
- Gesture; pointing and hand gestures can help get your message across.
- Picture charts; personalised picture charts can also be useful.

- Apps/Assistive Devices: There are various apps and assistive devices available to assist people with communication. However, they may not be suitable for everyone. It is recommended that you consult a Speech Therapist first.

How listeners can help

Here are some ways in which listeners can help someone if they are having difficulty speaking:

- Face to Face: look at the person as he or she is speaking.
- Yes/No questions: Ask the person simple questions that require a "yes" or "no" answer.
- Be patient; allow time for the person to get their message across.
- Encourage other ways of communication: e.g. gesture/pointing/writing.
- If you haven't understood what someone has said, ask them to repeat it but louder, or in another way.
- Try not to pretend you have understood if you haven't.

How Parkinson's Disease affects swallowing

Parkinson's Disease can also have an effect on swallowing drinks and/or food. Some warning signs of swallowing difficulties include:

- Choking or coughing when eating or drinking;
- Dribbling/drooling;
- Mealtimes taking much longer than they used to;
- Difficulty chewing food;
- Feeling of food getting 'caught in your throat';
- Difficulty / delay in starting a swallow
- Recurring chest infections
- Weight loss

What to do if you have difficulty swallowing?

If you notice any of these problems, please inform your Speech and Language Therapist and GP. A Speech Therapist will be able to assess your swallow, identify any swallowing difficulties and provide you with information on how to eat/drink safely. Some advice your Therapist might provide includes:

- Modifying your drinks/food – e.g. eating softer foods, thickening your drinks.
- Allowing extra time for meals.
- Cut-up food well.
- Add extra moisture, e.g. add sauce to food.
- Chew food well before swallowing.
- Making sure you are sitting fully upright and are fully alert when eating/drinking.
- Take small sips / mouthfuls at a time.

Useful Contact Details

If you would like some more information or advice regarding Parkinson's Disease and its effects on speech and swallow, please contact your local primary care team/health centre/Speech & Language Therapist. Alternatively ask your G.P or Public Health Nurse.

www.IASLT.ie

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