

# 10

**EARLY**

**WARNING**

**SIGNS OF**

**PARKINSON'S**

**DISEASE**

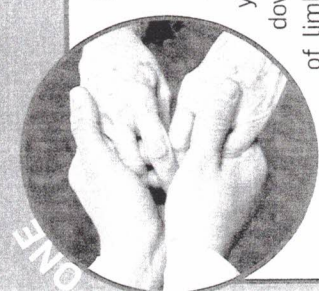


**NATIONAL PARKINSON®  
FOUNDATION**



Sometimes it is hard to tell that you might have Parkinson's disease. Parkinson's disease is when your brain stops making an important chemical called dopamine. This chemical helps your body to move, and helps your mood. If you do have Parkinson's, you can feel better by taking a pill that helps your body to replace that chemical. Parkinson's disease will get worse slowly over time, and your doctor can help you to stay healthy longer. Some of the problems listed here could be signs of Parkinson's disease.

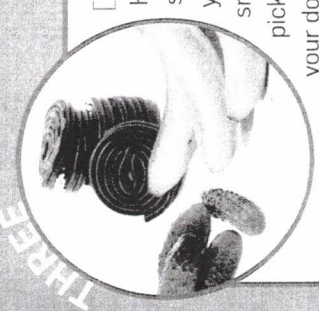
If you have any of these warning signs, you should tell your doctor about them and ask about Parkinson's disease. Check out the signs you have. You can take notes about how the symptom affects you on the lines under the description.



**TREMOR OR SHAKING.**

Have you noticed a slight shaking or tremor in your finger, thumb, hand, chin or lip? Does your leg shake when you sit down or relax? Twitching or shaking of limbs is a common early sign of Parkinson's disease.

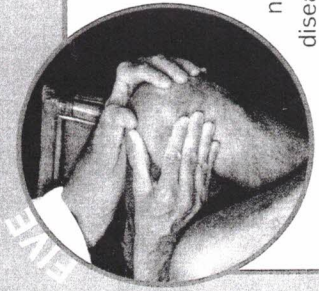
**What is normal?** Shaking can be normal after lots of exercise or if you have been injured. Shaking could also be caused by a medicine you take.



**LOSS OF SMELL.**

Have you noticed you no longer smell certain foods very well? If you seem to have more trouble smelling foods like bananas, dill pickles or licorice, you should ask your doctor about Parkinson's disease.

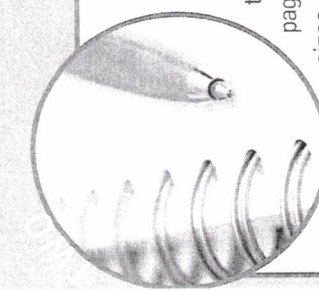
**What is normal?** Your sense of smell can be changed by a cold, flu or a stuffy nose, but it should come back after you are better.



**TROUBLE MOVING OR WALKING.**

Do you feel stiff in your body, arms or legs? Sometimes stiffness goes away as you move. If it does not, it can be a sign of Parkinson's disease. You might notice that your arms don't swing when you walk, or maybe other people have said you look stiff. An early sign might be stiffness or pain in your shoulder or hips. People sometimes say their feet seem 'stuck to the floor'.

**What is normal?** If you have injured your arm or shoulder, you may not be able to use it as well until it is healed, or another illness like arthritis might cause the same symptom.



**SMALL HANDWRITING.**

Has your handwriting suddenly gotten much smaller than in it was in the past? You may notice the way you write words on a page has changed: for example, letter sizes are smaller and the words are crowded together. A sudden change in handwriting is often a sign of Parkinson's disease.

**What is normal?** Sometimes writing can change as you get older, if you have stiff hands or fingers or poor vision, but this happens over time and not suddenly.



**TROUBLE SLEEPING.**

Do you thrash around in bed or kick and punch while you are deeply asleep? You might notice that you started falling out of bed while asleep. Sometimes, your spouse will notice, or will want to move to another bed. Sudden movements during sleep may be a sign of Parkinson's disease.

**What is normal?** It is normal for everyone to have a night when they 'toss and turn' instead of sleeping.



**CONSTIPATION.**

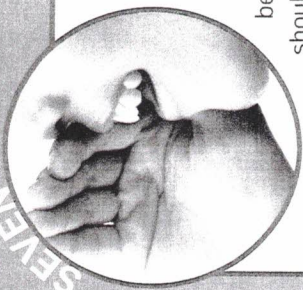
Do you have trouble moving your bowels without straining every day? Straining to move your bowels can be an early sign of Parkinson's disease and you should talk to your doctor.

**What is normal?** If you do not have enough water or fiber in your body, it can cause problems in the bathroom. Also some medicine will cause constipation. If there is no other reason such as diet or medicine that would cause you to have trouble moving your bowels, you should speak with your doctor.

**A SOFT OR LOW VOICE.**

Have other people told you that your voice is very soft when you speak in a normal tone, or that you sound hoarse? If there has been a change in your voice you should see your doctor about whether it could be Parkinson's disease. Sometimes you might think other people are losing their hearing, when really you are speaking more softly.

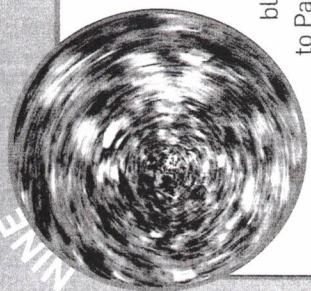
**What is normal?** A chest cold or other virus can cause your voice to sound different, but you should go back to sounding the same when you get over your cough or cold.



**DIZZINESS OR FAINTING.**

Do you notice that you often feel dizzy when you stand up out of a chair? Feeling dizzy or fainting can be signs of low blood pressure and can be linked to Parkinson's disease.

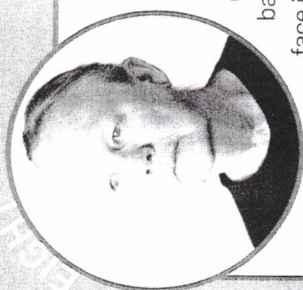
**What is normal?** Everyone has had a time when they stood up and felt dizzy, but if it happens on a regular basis you should see your doctor.



**MASKED FACE.**

Have you been told that you have a serious, depressed or mad look on your face more often, even when you are not in a bad mood? This serious looking face is called masking. Also, if you or other people notice that you have a blank stare or do not blink your eyes very often, you should ask your doctor about Parkinson's disease.

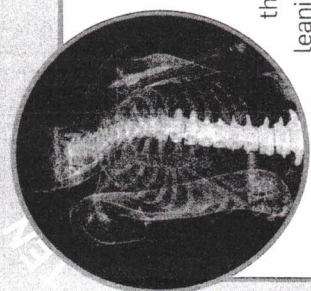
**What is normal?** Some medicines can cause you to have the same type of serious or staring look, but you would go back to the way you were after you stopped the medication.



**STOOPING OR HUNCHING OVER.**

Are you not standing up as straight as you used to? If you or your family or friends notice that you seem to be stooping, leaning or slouching when you stand, it could be a sign of Parkinson's disease.

**What is normal?** If you have pain from an injury or if you are sick, it might cause you to stand crookedly. Also, a problem with your bones can make you hunch over.





**N**o single one of these signs means that you should worry about Parkinson's disease. If you have more than one symptom, you should make an appointment to talk to your doctor.

Early diagnosis of Parkinson's disease gives you the best chance of a longer, healthier life.

*What you can do if you have Parkinson's disease:*

- Work with your doctor to create a care plan. Your doctor may refer you to a neurologist, a doctor who specializes in the brain.
- Work with your doctor to create a plan to stay healthy. This might include care from:
  - A physical or occupational therapist
  - A speech and language therapist
  - A medical social worker
- Start a regular exercise program to delay further symptoms.
- Talk with family and friends who can provide you with the support you need.



**HELPLINE:** English / Español  
**1.800.4PD.INFO (473-4636)**  
Get your PD questions answered.

**National Parkinson Foundation**  
200 SE 1st Street, Suite 800, Miami, FL 33131  
[www.parkinson.org](http://www.parkinson.org)