

Speech and language therapy and Parkinson's

Some people with Parkinson's may find they have problems with their speech and communication. This information sheet looks at what difficulties they may experience and how speech and language therapy can help.

What are speech and language therapists?

Speech and language therapists are healthcare professionals who specialise in all aspects of communication, from speech, language and using technology (see page 3) to the non-verbal aspects of facial expression and body language. They are part of the multidisciplinary team of healthcare professionals who can help you manage your condition.

They will help with any swallowing and communication problems you may experience, for example putting your thoughts into words, communicating your ideas to others and understanding what others are saying. They will be able to give you techniques or tips to help reduce problems and also help you prevent them from happening.

Why should I see a speech and language therapist?

Speech and language therapists may help with a range of symptoms which may cause concern for a person with Parkinson's, their family or carers. Symptoms include:

- slurred speech
- a breathy, weak voice
- speaking more quietly than you used to
- monotonous speech
- poor pace control, with either rushed or slow speech
- difficulty finding the right words
- difficulty eating
- difficulty drinking
- having reduced facial expressions and a 'blank face', due to difficulty in controlling facial muscles

- drooling (sometimes called sialorrhoea)
- multi-tasking – finding it difficult to talk clearly while doing other tasks or activities
- reduced body language, as a result of slowness of movement, stiffness and tremor.

Find out more: see our information sheets *Eating, swallowing and saliva control* and *Communication and Parkinson's*.

When should I see a speech and language therapist?

Clinical guidelines say that people with Parkinson's should have access to speech and language therapy, and we recommend that you speak to one as soon as you can after you've been diagnosed.

Even if you aren't experiencing any specific problems, a speech and language therapist can give you useful information about possible problems that may occur, how to spot them and what can be done about them.

A therapist may also spot subtle changes you might not be aware of. This will help you cope with the problem before it becomes more difficult to manage.

Your first appointment is likely to involve an assessment. This will give your therapist an idea of what treatment you need. The therapy that you receive and the number of sessions you have will depend on your individual needs, your preferences and the resources available.

How can a speech and language therapist help me?

In the early stages of Parkinson's, a speech and language therapist will focus on maintaining as much of your communication abilities as possible. A therapist will develop strategies and exercises to help with issues such as volume or loudness of speech, breathing and voice, speed of talking, facial expression and articulation (saying words clearly).

A speech and language therapist will also talk to you about the places and settings you communicate in, as they can play an important part in how your problems affect your everyday life. They can help you, for example, if you work in a very noisy office where a soft or quiet voice is difficult to hear or if you work in a very quiet environment that might not lend itself to speaking loudly.

Your therapist can help you with any problems you have with eating and drinking, such as swallowing and drooling. Your therapist may also suggest small pieces of equipment and special tools to help, for example a device that reminds you if your voice has become too quiet or one that prompts you to swallow.

If communicating becomes very difficult for you, a speech and language therapist can give you advice on different ways to cope. They will be able to recommend 'tools' that support spoken communication or offer a different way of communicating in certain situations, and train you and your family and/or carer to use them.

This may simply mean recommending that you carry a piece of paper and pencil or a book with key words and pictures in that you can point to, or using email to communicate with people, where possible.

“I had one-to-one speech therapy because I was concerned about the lack of resonance and expression in my voice. We did lots of exercises – practising different sounds and pitches – and reading set passages. It greatly improved my voice – and my confidence.”

Hugh, diagnosed in 2007

A speech therapist may also recommend that you use technology, such as a computer, voice amplifier or an ‘app’ (computer applications or programs designed to do a specific action) on your mobile phone or tablet computer (for example, an Apple iPad). There are apps available that help you to produce words or sentences, amplify your voice, or ‘clean up’ unclear speech.

What is Lee Silverman Voice Treatment?

The Lee Silverman Voice Treatment is a type of speech therapy developed specifically for people with Parkinson’s. It focuses on improving voice loudness to help with daily communication. The programme helps people with Parkinson’s to recognise that their voice is too quiet and trains them to speak more loudly. It is an intensive treatment programme and requires daily therapy and homework, with 16 sessions over a month, each lasting up to an hour.

There is evidence to support the benefits of the treatment and it is recommended in clinical guidelines. Unfortunately, however, it isn’t available everywhere – check with your speech and language therapist if it’s available in your area.

What advice can a speech and language therapist give carers or family members?

Speech and language therapists can give family and friends detailed explanations about voice and speech changes. They can also give carers or family members strategies and tips to help a person with Parkinson’s to communicate more effectively. These may include simple things such as watching a speaker’s face while they are talking, and limiting background noise, such as the sound from a television or radio. This may also involve discussing strategies to solve communication problems when the person with Parkinson’s or their carer are unable to make themselves understood.

They can also give carers and family members advice on how to spot the signs that someone is having problems eating or drinking.

Find out more: see our information sheets *Eating, swallowing and saliva control* and *Communication and Parkinson’s*.

How do I find a speech and language therapist?

Your GP or Parkinson’s nurse (if you have one) can refer you to a speech and language therapist, or you can refer yourself. Under the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists’ ‘Communicating Quality’ guidelines, all speech and language therapy should be available through self-referral to the local hospital trust or community therapy team. However, not all speech and language therapists are specialists in Parkinson’s, so make sure you ask to see someone who has experience of working with people living with the condition.

It can be helpful to be referred by a healthcare professional, because the speech and language therapist will then have a point of contact for medical information. Medical referrals are often required for swallowing assessment and treatment.

You can also pay for private speech and language therapy. You may have this individually or within a group. If you’re interested in finding a private speech and language therapist in your area, contact The Association of Speech and Language Therapists in Independent Practice. See page 4 for contact details.

You can also contact your local information and support worker for details of speech and language therapy services in your area. Find out more about information and support workers on page 5.

Is there anything I can do to help myself with communication problems?

If you are having problems speaking, Parkinson's medication, such as levodopa, might help improve the volume or clarity of your speech. Speak to your specialist or Parkinson's nurse for more information.

If you have Parkinson's, it is important to take your Parkinson's medication as advised by your specialist or Parkinson's nurse. Taking your medication for Parkinson's at the right time will help you to manage your symptoms more effectively.

There are also practical things you can do that may help you train your voice. These include, for example, trying to imagine that you are speaking in a bigger room than you are or to a larger group of people. You could also image that the listener is further away than they are. Tricks like this can help you to speak more clearly and loudly.

Find out more: see our information sheet *Communication and Parkinson's*.

More information and support

Parkinson's nurses

Parkinson's nurses provide expert advice and support to people with Parkinson's and those who care for them. They can also make contact with other health and social care professionals to make sure your needs are met.

The role of the Parkinson's nurse varies. Each will offer different services, aiming to meet local needs. Some nurses are based in the community, whereas others are based in hospital settings.

Many Parkinson's nurses are independent prescribers. This means they can prescribe and make adjustments to medication, so someone with Parkinson's doesn't always need to see their specialist for changes to or queries about their Parkinson's drugs.

Parkinson's nurses may not be available in every area, but your GP or specialist can give you more details on local services.

You can find out more at parkinsons.org.uk/nurses

Information and support from Parkinson's UK

You can call our free confidential helpline for general support and information. Call **0808 800 0303** (calls are free from UK landlines and most mobile networks) or email hello@parkinsons.org.uk. We run a peer support service if you'd like to talk on the phone with someone affected by Parkinson's who has faced similar issues to you. The service is free and confidential – ring the helpline to talk to someone about being matched with a volunteer.

Our helpline can also put you in touch with one of our Parkinson's local advisers, who give one-to-one information and support to anyone affected by Parkinson's. They can also provide links to local groups and services.

We also have a self-management programme for people with Parkinson's, partners and carers. It is an opportunity to reflect on life with the condition, learn about self-management and think about the future. To find out if there is a group near you visit parkinsons.org.uk/selfmanagement

Our website **[parkinsons.org.uk](https://www.parkinsons.org.uk/localtoyou)** has a lot of information about Parkinson's and everyday life with the condition. You can also find details of your local support team and your nearest local group meeting at **[parkinsons.org.uk/localtoyou](https://www.parkinsons.org.uk/localtoyou)**

You can also visit **[parkinsons.org.uk/forum](https://www.parkinsons.org.uk/forum)** to speak with other people in a similar situation on our online discussion forum.

Thank you

Thank you very much to everyone who contributed to or reviewed this information sheet:

Professor Nick Miller, Lecturer/Honorary Speech and Language Therapist, Institute of Health and Society, University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne

Julia Johnson, Clinical Lead Specialist Speech and Language Therapist (Neurology), Kings College Hospital, London

Thanks also to our information review group and other people affected by Parkinson's who provided feedback.

Can you help?

At Parkinson's UK, we are totally dependent on donations from individuals and organisations to fund the work that we do. There are many ways that you can help us to support people with Parkinson's.

If you would like to get involved, please contact our Supporter Services team on **0800 138 6593** or visit our website at **[parkinsons.org.uk/donate](https://www.parkinsons.org.uk/donate)**. Thank you.

Our information

All of our most up-to-date information is available at **[parkinsons.org.uk/informationsupport](https://www.parkinsons.org.uk/informationsupport)**

If you'd prefer to read one of our printed leaflets or booklets, find out how to place an order at **[parkinsons.org.uk/orderingresources](https://www.parkinsons.org.uk/orderingresources)** or by calling **0300 123 3689**.

We make every effort to ensure that our services provide current, unbiased and accurate information. We hope that this will add to any professional advice you receive and help you to make any decisions you may face. Please do continue to talk to your health and social care team if you are worried about any aspect of living with Parkinson's.

If you'd like to find out more about how we put our information together, including references and the sources of evidence we use, please contact us at **publications@parkinsons.org.uk**

Speech and language therapy (PKFS07/2013)

Do you have any feedback about this information? Your comments will help us ensure our resources are as useful and easy to understand as possible. Please return to **Information Content team, Parkinson's UK, 215 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 1EJ**, or email publications@parkinsons.org.uk. Thank you!

1. Please choose the option that best fits you.

- I have Parkinson's and was diagnosed in I care for someone with Parkinson's
 I have a friend or family member with Parkinson's I'm a professional working with people with Parkinson's
 Other (please specify)
-

2. Where did you get this information from?

- GP Specialist Parkinson's nurse Parkinson's UK local group Parkinson's UK local adviser
 Ordered directly from us Call to the helpline
 Other (please specify)
-

3. Has it answered all your questions?

- Yes, completely Yes, mostly Not sure Partly Not at all

4. How easy was it to understand?

- Very easy Easy Not sure Quite difficult Very difficult

5. Has it helped you manage your condition better, or make choices that have improved your life in some way?

- It helped a lot It helped a little No change It didn't help It made things worse

6. What is your ethnic background?*

- Asian or Asian British Black or Black British Chinese Mixed White British White other
 Other (please specify)
-

*We ask about your ethnicity to ensure our information is reaching a broad range of people. However, this question is optional.

Want to hear more from us?

- I would like a response to my feedback I would like to be a member of Parkinson's UK
 I'm interested in joining the Information review group, to offer feedback on Parkinson's UK information

If you've answered yes to any of these options, please complete your details below.

Name

Address

Email

Telephone

How would you prefer us to contact you?

- Email Post Phone

We will not pass on your details to any other organisation or third party. To find out more, read our privacy policy at parkinsons.org.uk/termsandconditions

Every hour, two people in the UK are told they have Parkinson's – a brain condition that turns lives upside down, leaving a future full of uncertainty.

Parkinson's UK is here to make sure people have whatever they need to take back control – from information to inspiration.

We want everyone to get the best health and social care. So we bring professionals together to drive improvements that enable people to live life to the full.

Ultimately, we want to end Parkinson's. That's why we inspire and support the international research community to develop life-changing treatments, faster. And we won't stop until we find a cure.

Together we can bring forward the day when no one fears Parkinson's.

Parkinson's UK

Free confidential helpline **0808 800 0303**

Monday to Friday 9am–7pm, Saturday 10am–2pm. Interpreting available.

NGT Relay **18001 0808 800 0303** (for use with smart phones, tablets, PCs and other devices).

For more information see www.ngts.org.uk

hello@parkinsons.org.uk

parkinsons.org.uk

Last updated October 2013. We review our information within three years.

Please check our website for the most up-to-date versions of all our information.

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