

Parkinson's Fact Sheet

What is Parkinson's Disease?

Parkinson's disease is a brain disease that affects more than 1 million elderly Americans. It is one of a group of conditions called movement disorders. The disease is caused by the progressive loss of dopamine-producing brain cells. Its typical symptoms include tremor or trembling, stiffness of the limbs and trunk, slowness of movement and impaired body balance and coordination. Early symptoms of Parkinson's disease are subtle and develop gradually, but as the disease progresses the symptoms may become severe and interfere with daily activities.

What Causes Parkinson's Disease?

The exact causes of Parkinson's disease are not known, but scientists think both environmental and genetic factors are involved. However, there is evidence that for most of the Parkinson's disease occurrence, environmental factors may be more important.

How is Parkinson's Disease Diagnosed?

In its early stage, Parkinson's disease is similar to some other neurological conditions. The clinical diagnosis of Parkinson's disease is often made by neurologist with special training in Parkinson's disease (called a movement disorder specialist) based on a combination of clinical symptoms. There is no laboratory test for the condition.

What Are the Treatments for Parkinson's Disease?

Currently, there is no cure for Parkinson's disease. There are drugs that help patients manage many of the symptoms, although they do not stop the progression of the disease. Patients are often treated with Sinemet, a combination of levodopa and carbidopa. Another category of drugs called dopamine agonists may also help with Parkinson's disease symptoms. Drugs in this category include bromocriptine, pergolide, pramipexole, apokyn, and ropinirole. Other pharmaceutical and surgical treatments (such as deep brain stimulation) of Parkinson's disease also exist. Patients should work closely with their doctors to find the best treatment approach.

The following websites provide more information about Parkinson's Disease

National Institute of Neurological Diseases and Stroke: <http://www.ninds.nih.gov/>

The Michael J. Fox Foundation: <http://www.michaeljfox.org/>

National Parkinson Foundation: <http://www.parkinson.org/>

Parkinson's Disease Foundation: <http://www.pdf.org/>

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