

7 Myths and Misperceptions about Parkinson's Disease



Parkinson's disease is the second most common neurological disease in the U.S. with about 1.5 million living with this illness (Alzheimer's is the first with about 5 million). Despite a growing awareness and the help of well-known people living with Parkinson's like Michael J Fox and Mohammed Ali, it is still misunderstood, so we've compiled a list of some of the most common myths and misperceptions about Parkinson's to set the record straight.

1. **You're not old enough to have Parkinson's. It's an old person's disease.**

Although the majority of people diagnosed with Parkinson's are 60 years and older, there are people who are diagnosed while as young as in their teenage years. People living with Parkinson's who are 50 years and younger are known as having Young Onset Parkinson's. Michael J Fox was 31 years old when he was diagnosed.

2. **Symptoms of Parkinson's are:**

muscle rigidity, resting tremor, slow movement (bradykinesia), postural instability.

And so much more! Apart from the more well-known movement disorder symptoms like small handwriting (micrographia), freezing, and mask-like facial expression, there are also many non-movement disorder symptoms that can't be seen such as a quiet voice, loss of sense of smell, difficulty swallowing, sleeping problems, vision loss, low blood pressure, difficulties with balance, constipation, depression and/or anxiety and cognitive changes.

3. **You don't have a tremor, so you don't have Parkinson's.**

Parkinson's symptoms vary from one person to the next, and many do not experience tremors. There are different kinds of tremors, too, that occur with other diseases. The Parkinson tremor is best described as occurring when the person is at rest, and as a pill-rolling movement (as though the person is rolling a pill between their index finger and thumb).

4. **I know someone with Parkinson's, so I know what it's like.**

Something we often say is, "If you know one person with Parkinson's, you know **one** person with Parkinson's". That's because the symptoms can vary so much from one person to another.

5. **Michael J Fox moves around a lot because he has Parkinson's.**

Those jerky movements that Michael J Fox works so hard at to control are called dyskinesias, and are not a symptom of the disease, but rather a side effect of the medications he takes.

6. **S/he used to be able to (move faster/speak louder, etc.) and is just being stubborn, obstinate, etc.**

Life with Parkinson's is like a kaleidoscope, ever changing. When someone living with Parkinson's is having a good day, we might think that they're as capable as they were before, but things like stress and lack of sleep can turn the tables. If we get frustrated trying to help someone with Parkinson's complete a task or go from one place to another, imagine what it must be like for them? It's helpful all around if we can understand the changing dynamics of the disease and **practice patience**.

7. **My loved one with Parkinson's is just having a bad day and the medications aren't working properly.**

People with Parkinson's can have other medical issues just like anyone else. If there is a **sudden** change in behavior or symptoms, contact your doctor or neurologist straight away. A bacterial infection such as a urinary tract infection or pneumonia can not only render the standard Parkinson's medications less effective, but cause delirium and confusion, as well as increased difficulties in movement and balance.



While there is no cure for Parkinson's disease at this time, we hope that until one is found, you will help our friends by gaining a better understanding of the disease, in order to help them . . .

. . . make the most of life with Parkinson's

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