



# Diagnosing Parkinson's disease

Parkinson's disease is usually diagnosed by a neurologist (a doctor who deals with conditions affecting the brain, nerves and spinal cord), a geriatrician (a doctor who specialises in the care of older adults) or a specialist physician, after a clinical assessment. Your doctor will build a picture of your symptoms using lots of different approaches. Factors such as your age, your symptoms, your medical history and access to healthcare where you live can all impact how quickly you'll get an accurate diagnosis. Learn more about how Parkinson's disease is diagnosed.

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## I'm worried I might have Parkinson's disease. What should I do?

It could be frightening when you have symptoms that might be a sign of a serious condition such as Parkinson's. Sometimes, we allow our fears to stop us from getting these symptoms checked out so that we don't have to deal with the reality of an actual confirmed diagnosis. If you suspect you or a loved one has Parkinson's, the best thing you can do is to see a doctor (preferably



someone who has expertise in movement disorders or neurology) as soon as possible. The sooner you get help, the sooner your Parkinson's symptoms can be controlled with medical treatment, alongside exercise and a healthy lifestyle.

You can check what you're experiencing with our in-depth look into the [symptoms of Parkinson's](#).

## How should I prepare for a visit to the doctor?

It can make all the difference if you go into a doctor's appointment feeling prepared. Before you see a doctor about your symptoms, it could be helpful to:

- ★ Write down all your symptoms in a diary or keep a log of them on your phone.
- ★ Note down how long you think you've had each symptom.
- ★ Think about how your symptoms are affecting daily tasks and your quality of life.

Take time to really think about these before your appointment – it will help you explain what you've been experiencing. Taking your notes with you means you will remember everything you need to tell your doctor.

If possible, ask a close friend or relative to accompany you to your appointment. It's easy to forget everything a doctor tells you, particularly if you're feeling emotional. Having a loved one with you means they can support you and help to remember all the information you'll hear. If no one can make it to the appointment with you, take a notepad and pen to write down anything that you might forget.



## How is Parkinson's disease diagnosed?

There is no specific test for diagnosing Parkinson's disease. Your doctor will consider various aspects of your health and base a diagnosis on lots of different pieces of information, like piecing together a jigsaw.

When you first visit a doctor, they will:

- ★ Ask you about your symptoms. Remember to take your notes or a symptom diary with you to help you explain them.
- ★ Do some neurological tests. For example, they may check your reflexes by shining a light into your eyes, tapping on your forehead or using a special medical hammer to lightly tap on your knee to see how your body responds.
- ★ Check your sensory skills. This means testing how well you can see, hear, smell and feel things.
- ★ Test how well you listen and respond to questions. They may ask you to write, draw and speak so they can see if you have a range of facial expressions and to check your speech.
- ★ Look at how you're moving and how well you can move your arms and legs. Common movement (motor) symptoms of Parkinson's include slowness of movement (bradykinesia), stiffness, lack of balance and resting tremors.

Once they've gathered insights from these, your doctor may suspect you have Parkinson's disease.

But they may also find it difficult to make a definite diagnosis. Taking Parkinson's medication and monitoring how your body responds can help them be more certain. If your symptoms improve when you start taking medication like levodopa for Parkinson's disease, and then your symptoms get worse again when the medication wears off, your doctor will have a clearer picture of your health.



There are other conditions that also respond to Parkinson's disease medication. Your doctor will monitor the way your symptoms change to see if they are caused by a different medical condition.

Brain scans can help with a diagnosis of Parkinson's disease. These are neurological scans called magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) or striatal dopamine transporter imaging (DaTSCAN) and they enable doctors to see the structure of your brain and how the different areas are working. But they are only available at specialist clinics, can be costly and are not always necessary.

## Receiving a diagnosis of Parkinson's

Being told you have Parkinson's disease can be overwhelming.

Having a loved one with you at your appointments may be a comfort. Finding out as much as you can about Parkinson's disease from a healthcare professional can also help. They can explain how people can have a good quality of life and live well with Parkinson's disease. This might be a general doctor or a specialist depending on where you live.

Write down any questions you have for them about Parkinson's disease. You might want to ask:

- ★ [Which treatments are available to me?](#)
- ★ Will I be able to access any services or supportive therapies that can help Parkinson's symptoms such as speech therapy or physiotherapy?
- ★ Is there a [local](#) or [virtual](#) support group for people with Parkinson's disease?
- ★ How will Parkinson's affect my everyday life? What might it stop me doing?
- ★ Is it safe for me to continue to work?



Check out our [Support page](#) for further resources.

## Sources (all accessed June 2022)

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