

UNDERSTANDING THE 5 STAGES OF PARKINSON'S DISEASE AND TIPS FOR COPING

STAGE 1



Typically the first sign of Parkinson's disease is a trembling in the hands or limbs, or uncontrollable shaking. The first stage of the disease is also when loved ones may notice other mild symptoms including poor posture and loss of balance. People suffering from Parkinson's also may begin displaying abnormal facial expressions.

The initial diagnosis of Parkinson's is always a shock, but it's during this time that loved ones will need to keep a level head and help prepare for long-term care. Care partners should ask their loved ones if they can accompany them to doctor's visits so they can take a more active role in treatment and care. Keep a calendar to stay on top of doctor's visits, therapy sessions, and start and stop dates for medications. Being organized and prepared is important for helping your loved one with Parkinson's at the early stages.

STAGE 2



During the second stage of Parkinson's, symptoms progress to the point where walking becomes more difficult, and the person may have much greater difficulty maintaining his or her balance. Simple physical tasks like buttoning a shirt or tying shoes become increasingly challenging.

By the time a person enters into the second stage of Parkinson's, everyday tasks can become exceedingly difficult for him or her to perform, and you may feel the need to jump in and take over as much as possible for him or her. However, this can make your loved one feel helpless, which worsens the depression that typically accompanies a Parkinson's diagnosis. Try to let your loved one do as much as he or she can do alone, giving him or her enough time to do those tasks. Setting realistic, achievable goals for your loved one can help him or her feel more independent.

STAGE 3



Physical movements become much slower for people suffering from the third stage of Parkinson's, and it becomes more difficult for them to speak clearly. People in this stage of the disease may no longer be able to walk straight or stand without support.

Communication becomes much harder for people suffering from Parkinson's as the disease progresses, and you have to remember to be patient and understanding. If you're having trouble understanding your loved one's speech, remember to talk to him or her face to face and ask your loved one to repeat what he or she says. Asking questions that can be easily answered yes or no can be helpful.

STAGE 4



The severity of symptoms continues to progress in the fourth stage of Parkinson's, and by this point a person may be unable to live on his or her own. Patients generally are unable to walk for more than a few steps at a time, and this stage also is characterized by advanced stiffness in the limbs and extremely slow movement.

By this stage of your loved one's condition, caring for him or her is most likely a full-time job. Even though you may feel as if you need to devote all of your free time to caring for your loved one, it's also important to remember to take care of yourself. Having others whom you trust to help and provide respite care can give you an opportunity to take time to see friends, participate in the activities you enjoy, and give yourself a chance to relax.

STAGE 5



The final stage of Parkinson's usually means a person is incapable of taking care of himself or herself, and he or she may not be able to stand or walk at all. In most cases, a person in this stage of the disease needs to be in nursing care full time.

Your loved one needs your care and support through this incredibly difficult time, but getting care and support for yourself can be equally important. The emotional toll of Parkinson's on care partners as well as patients is massive, and it can help to have a sympathetic ear. There are support groups for people suffering from Parkinson's and their care providers, and in many cases there are groups for both to attend together. Finding one that can help you and your loved one cope with the stress can help relieve some of the burden you are both experiencing.