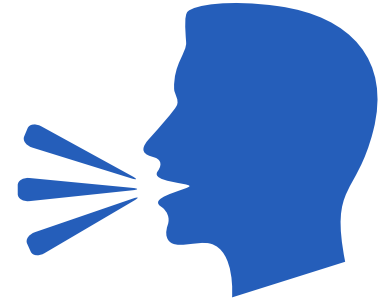




Living with Parkinson's Disease (PD)

Communication Tips & Strategies

According to the Parkinson's Foundation research shows that 89% of people with Parkinson's disease experience speech and voice disorders. Early assessment and intervention is key to maintaining communication abilities as the disease progresses.



What causes speech and voice problems in PD?

Parkinson's disease is a disorder of the motor system that may result in rigidity, slowness of movement, and/or tremors.

Just as PD can cause poor muscle activation leading to slow and small movements in the limbs, PD can also affect the muscles involved with speech, including the respiratory system, voice box (larynx), and articulators for speech (tongue, lips, etc.).

Symptoms of speech and voice problems in PD include:

- Reduced volume/soft voice
- Hoarse or strained voice
- Breathy voice (takes more energy to speak)
- Monotone/unchanging pitch
- Difficulty pronouncing letters/words
- Slurring
- Tremor
- Loss of facial expression

Quality of life risk factors may include:

- Less likely to participate in conversation
- Reduced confidence in social settings
- Frustration with peers/caregivers

How can speech-language pathology help maintain and/or improve communication abilities with PD?:

- Learn techniques to conserve energy
- Instruct in use of assistive devices or techniques if appropriate
- Recommend exercises to help enhance muscle strength and movements needed to improve speech and communication options

Communication Tips for the Person with PD

- Select a well-lit, quiet place for visiting. Turn off televisions and other devices that create noise.
- Face your listener during conversation and speak slowly.
- Use shorter phrases when speaking to conserve energy, say one or two words per breath.
- Plan time to rest your voice between activities or visitors.
- Keep your throat hydrated. Drink plenty of water.
- Sit upright to improve airflow when talking.
- Consider using an amplifier if voice is low/soft.
- Know your topic before speaking.
- Use gestures.
- Write down your intended message.
- Use a bell or buzzer to get attention, if unable to verbally.
- Utilize an adaptive communication device, if appropriate. Discuss options with a speech-language pathologist (SLP).
- Utilize low-tech communication forms to relay wants/needs (picture boards, symbol charts, etc.).

Listener/Caregiver Strategies

- Look at the person with PD face-to-face while communicating and maintain eye contact.
- Ask simple yes/no questions instead of open-ended questions.
- Allow plenty of time for the person with PD to answer questions.
- Pay attention to body language and gestures.
- Ask for the person with PD to repeat, if not understanding.
- Prompt to speak slowly.
- Cue to exaggerate their speech or talk like they are speaking "across the room."
- Request the person with PD write down words that are difficult to understand.