

Living With Parkinson's Disease



Parkinson's disease is a progressive disorder of the central nervous system that affects more than 1 million men and women in the United States. It is caused by degeneration of neurons in the brain that results in muscular rigidity, tremors, slow movement, poor balance, and problems walking. The exact cause of Parkinson's disease is unknown but experts know that many symptoms occur because of a severe lack of a chemical in the brain called dopamine.

Although medication is often used to treat symptoms of Parkinson's disease, occupational therapy intervention can help a person maintain maximum function in his or her day-to-day routines and enable them to live meaningful lives.

What can an occupational therapist do?

- **Facilitate** a person's joint movement and help to maintain it.
- **Improve** a person's dexterity and coordination.
- **Develop** and practice safe techniques for balance.
- **Teach** adaptive techniques to reduce the effects of a tremor for improved hand function.
- **Implement** activities that enhance a person's voice volume for better communication.
- **Adapt** handwriting techniques and introduce the use of a computer.
- **Explore** new ways of engaging in favorite activities or hobbies.
- **Recommend** adaptive equipment and train a person to use to perform daily tasks.
- **Evaluate** psychological and cognitive problems that may develop as a result of Parkinson's and help individuals cope with conditions that may include depression, stress, and dementia.

- **Suggest** home modifications that may improve safety or increase access or both for ADL or IADL performance.

What can friends and family of a person with Parkinson's do?

- **Stay** educated about the person's condition and abilities and adapt accordingly.
- **Support** environment and lifestyle changes that often need to be made by a person with Parkinson's disease.
- **Encourage** medical consultation with a physician.
- **Request** a referral for occupational therapy from a family physician to promote maximal capabilities in self-care, household tasks, and valued life activities.

Need more information?

Parkinson's disease is a serious problem that should not go untreated. Occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants are trained in helping both adults and children with a broad range of physical, cognitive, developmental, and psychological impairments and conditions. Practitioners also help clients and their caregivers with strategies that can prevent injury and

secondary complications, and support health and well-being. If you would like to consult an occupational therapist, practitioners are available through most hospitals, medical centers, and community clinics. Contact your local health organizations for more information.

 The Fund To
Promote Awareness of
Occupational Therapy