

Your health care team and how to access it



Living well with Parkinson's is possible and there are many people who can help. Building a strong health care team is essential for managing Parkinson's effectively. Parkinson's affects everyone differently, a well-rounded team of medical professionals, therapists, and support providers can help address your unique symptoms and needs. Here are the types of professionals you may want to consider and how to access them:

Family physician

- Looks after your general medical care, annual physical examinations, and acute problems.
- May treat your Parkinson's, or otherwise stay in contact with your specialist.

Neurologist

- A specialist physician who has completed a three-year training program in the medical or surgical area of their choice in an accredited training program.
- Some focus on diseases such as Parkinson's and other movement disorders.
- Will make or confirm the diagnosis of Parkinson's, recommend treatment and monitor your progress.
- Two annual visits are recommended, particularly for medication management.
- Requires a referral from your general practitioner.

Movement Disorder Clinic

- Specialized in the holistic treatment of movement disorders like Parkinson's.
- Gives you access to a team of allied health care professionals including recreation and occupational therapists, speech language pathologists, etc.

Psychiatrist

- Diagnoses and treats mental disorders that can occur in Parkinson's such as depression, anxiety, and disturbances in feelings, thoughts, behaviour and cognitive processes.
- Treatments include psychotherapy, counselling and medication.
- Requires a referral from a general practitioner or your neurologist.

Psychologist

- Trained to help you cope with the emotional impact of chronic illness.
- Techniques include psychotherapy and behaviour modification.
- Some specialize in sophisticated testing of cognitive changes some are associated with hospitals and clinics where their services are paid for by provincial plans, while private practice costs may be covered by extended benefit insurance plans.
- No medical referral is required.

Clinical nurse

- Located in Movement Disorder Clinics across Canada.
- Provide education and counselling on all aspects of Parkinson's and how it affects your daily life, with ongoing care and help between clinic visits.
- Assists with adapting to medication and making dosage adjustments.
- Telephone counselling may help without the need of a clinic visit.
- Liaises with other members of your health care team to ensure optimum care.

Rehabilitation therapists

- Assess mobility, balance and posture, prescribing exercise programs.
- Advises on community-based sports or exercise programs.
- Offers techniques to improve walking, and teaches you and your family how to prevent and overcome problems such as falling.
- When located in hospital, costs are generally covered by the public health care system in Canada, but coverage varies by province and territory.
- Community physiotherapy may be covered by extended healthcare plans.

Speech language pathologist

- Can design a program to help you improve your communication.
- Often they are hospital-based where a medical referral is required.
- Some have private practices and fees may be covered by extended health plans.

Occupational therapist

- Addresses problems around self care, work and leisure.
- Provides advice, instruction on adaptive equipment, safety awareness, and mobility issues.
- Their advice is valuable when purchasing assistive devices or in-home adaptations, to avoid costly mistakes and to ensure your purchase is tax deductible.

Massage therapists

- Provide short-term relief from muscle stiffness and rigidity.

- They are based in private practice rather than hospitals and are not covered by provincial plans.
- Some extended benefit plans provide limited coverage for massage therapy services.

Dietician

- Helps you to plan a healthy diet and advises you on how to prepare and enjoy your meals in ways that will take your symptoms into account.
- Some hospitals have an outpatient dietician, that may be covered by provincial and territorial health care plans.
- Physician referral may be required.

Social workers

- Helps with social, emotional, financial, and family concerns related to chronic illness trained in individual, family/marital counseling to address many of the changes that occur while adjusting to major medical illness, including long-term care arrangements.
- Helps you get connected with the appropriate resources in your community.
- Located in hospitals and the community generally, no charge for their services.

Pharmacist

- Dispenses your prescription drugs and gives advice on over-the-counter medications, and supplements, and provides additional information about your prescriptions.
- If you are taking multiple drugs for multiple problems, you are less likely to encounter problems with incompatible drugs if all your prescriptions are on file in one pharmacy.

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