

Communication and Parkinson's Disease

"Communication is the imparting or exchange of ideas or feelings by speech, writing or gestures."

About one half of people with Parkinson's disease develop problems with their speech and communication, while others may hardly be affected at all.

Speech can be:

- Slurred
- Monotonous with a lack of variation and expression in the voice
- Hoarse and tremulous (shaky)
- Soft, or it may get softer after speaking for a while
- Slow or fast, or may have problem with rhythm.
- There may be problems with starting to speak, speech may get progressively faster, or there may be stammering.

Writing:

- May be normal at first, but then becomes smaller and smaller
- May be spidery and difficult to read
- Your hand may shake too much to write
- For tips on improving writing refer to section on "Working and Leisure" in sheet entitled "Living with Parkinson's Disease".

Facially:

- You may appear to have lost your frown or smile
- Your face may lack expression

Tips to improve communication

- Face the person you are speaking to
- Turn down background noise, such as the radio or TV, during a conversation
- Use your loud voice when talking
- Open your mouth wider when you talk
- Take a deep breath before you start to speak
- Use shorter phrases
- Slowdown!

The exercises suggested in this leaflet are designed to improve communication by making the voice louder and less monotonous and by reducing stiffness of facial muscles. However, everyone is different, and they may not suit you. If you are experiencing any problems with your speech, ask your consultant or GP to refer you to a speech and language therapist who will be able to provide you with an exercise programme that suits your needs.

While you are speaking and when doing these exercises, make sure that:

- You have a good upright posture
- Your shoulders and neck are relaxed
- Your mouth is open sufficiently
- You are not straining your voice
- You are using a pitch level that feels comfortable for you

The following exercises are aimed to reduce stiffness of the muscles of the vocal cords and to improve co-ordination of the muscles used for breathing while you speak. Repeat each exercise 10 times.

1. Take a deep breath and say the sound "ah" three times in a high voice three times and three times in a low voice.

2. Start on a low "ah" and glide to a high "ah". Then start on a high "ah" and glide to a low "ah". Practice using a loud voice in the following way:

3. Write out ten everyday phrases e.g. "Good morning" / "How are you?" and concentrate on these. Repeat each phrase ten times in a loud voice. Try reading short newspaper articles out loud. Although your voice may sound really loud to you, it probably sounds just right for your listener. Through practice and positive feedback from others, you should gradually learn to estimate how loudly to speak.


Tape record yourself while doing the exercises - this will improve your awareness of how you sound using a louder voice.

Try to get a family member or friend to give you feedback when you are carrying out the exercises and also about how your speech sounds during the day.

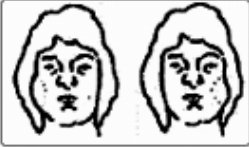
To prevent stiffness of the muscles used in facial expression:

1. Often, because of muscular rigidity, some sounds are difficult to pronounce and make clear. To counteract this, put a clean mirror on the table in front of you so that you can see yourself clearly. Practise lip spreading and lip rounding alternately - i.e.

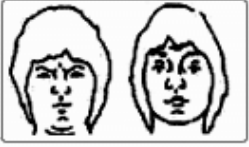
aa - ee - oo



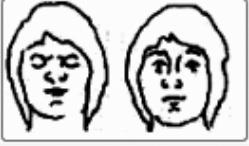
2. Puff up cheeks to right to left



3. Frown as hard as you can Then raise your eyebrows,



4. Close your eyes as tight as you can then open them wide.



Swallowing

There are a lot of muscles involved in swallowing, so it is not surprising that it can be affected by Parkinson's. The following are some general points that may help with your swallowing.

- Do not mix eating with other activities – turn off the TV and concentrate!
- If you find three meals difficult try having more frequent smaller meals.
- Good posture – sit in a relaxed but upright position. Lean slightly forward with your chin tucked in slightly. Imagine you are looking a few inches in front of your knees.

You should never ignore swallowing difficulties. Get an appointment with the Speech and Language Therapist for an assessment and advice.