



# Oral Healthcare for People with Parkinson's

Parkinson's disease is a neurodegenerative disease that affects part of the brain causing cognitive and behavioural symptoms. In the early stages of the disease health professionals will tend to focus on the limited mobility aspect of the disease. Physical symptoms include rigidity, shaking and uncontrolled movements including balance which progressively gets worse over time making it difficult to maintain good oral hygiene.

## Oral Healthcare

Maintaining good oral health for people with Parkinson's Disease [PD] may become more difficult as symptoms such as rigidity, tremor and dyskinesia can make it hard to brush one's teeth. PD is also associated with orofacial pain, grinding and taste impairment and may lead to cracked and worn teeth from grinding. In addition to this, medication prescribed to treat PD might cause some problems with the oral health such as dry mouth and drooling, making the individual more prone to fungal infections of the oral cavity and dental decay.

## Dry Mouth

Some medications used to treat Parkinson's Disease cause a dry mouth [xerostomia] whilst other medications can increase saliva production. It may seem paradoxical but these two conditions may occur together.

A lack of saliva increases the prevalence of decay and gum disease as well as cause difficulty in retaining dentures.

Reduced saliva increases the prevalence of decay and gum disease and infections in the mouth.

## Suggestion

- Regular sips of water/ sugar free beverages. Tea and coffee without sugar.
- Saliva -increasing lozenges or mouth rinses such as Biotin, Oralieve gel or Act for dry mouth.

## Drooling

May be related to swallowing problems, for example, if less swallowing is reduced, saliva can build up and overflow. It can lead to sore or cracked lips.

## Suggestion

- A change of posture can help as a stooped head down position increases drooling.
- Try closing your lips as tight as you can and hold for a count of 4, relax and repeat 5 times.
- Smack your lips together as if puffing on a pipe.
- Stretch your lips in a wide smile and hold for a count of 4 then relax.
- Use a beeper to remind you to swallow.

Reference: All Wales Special Interest Group Special Oral Health Care Mouth Care for People with Parkinson's Disease [leaflet]

## Swallow Difficulties

Parkinson's Disease can cause the muscles in the jaw and face to weaken which affects chewing and swallowing.

### Suggestion

- Taking smaller bites when chewing and before swallowing,
- Eating more slowly before swallowing
- Sitting upright with head up when eating.
- Jaw exercises recommended by a speech and language therapist to strengthen muscles in the mouth and jaw may also help PD patients with improved quality of life and oral health.
- Making changes to the diet to include foods and liquids that are easier and safer to swallow.

Reference: Parkinsons.org.uk, Eating, Swallowing and Saliva Control [Information and support]

## Loose Dentures

People with PD may have difficulty controlling their denture/s due to decrease in muscle strength of the jaw, facial muscles and tongue and dry mouth.

Loose dentures that rub part of the mouth may cause ulcers making exacerbate eating and speaking difficulties.

Mouth and Dental Issues in Parkinson's [resource]. Parkinson's Disease Society, Sept 2018

## Toothbrushing suggestions

- Use a small, soft headed toothbrush with pea size amount of fluoride, non-foaming toothpaste.
- A powered toothbrush may be beneficial as the handle is larger and easier grip compared to a manual toothbrush. Ensure that the toothbrush head is small and soft or medium bristles. A 3-sided toothbrush may be considered as it brushes 3 surfaces at once.
- Disclosing tablet or solution can be used after brushing. This dye will show up where plaque has been missed.
- Brush 2-3 teeth at a time ensuring that bristles sweep along the gingival margins.
- \* Use the hand with most strength although it would be helpful to learn to use both hands for toothbrushing alternating the toothbrush. As Parkinson's Disease may be more disabling in one limb as the disease progresses causing rigidity and tremor.
- Individualized instructions regarding oral hygiene, together with chewing and lip exercises can improve oral health in Parkinson's Disease cases

\* Evidence-Based Recommendations for the Oral Health of Patients with Parkinson's Disease, Ana L. C. Martimbianco et al. Neurology & Therapy Journal March 2021

Ask a Question. We're here to help!