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SENIOR HEALTH

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# Parkinson's Disease

## WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

Parkinson's disease is a progressive disorder of the central nervous system that affects over 1 million people in the United States. The symptoms usually begin between the ages of 50 and 70. The onset of Parkinson's disease is gradual, so symptoms may go unnoticed until the advanced stage. Symptoms will continue to worsen until severe disability occurs.

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### **SIGNS OF PARKINSON'S DISEASE**

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*tremors, usually starting in one hand*

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*sluggish responses*

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*muscular rigidity*

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*soft, slow speech*

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*difficulty walking*

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*fixed facial expression*

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*staring, unblinking eyes*

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*open mouth with drooling*

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*greasy, scaling facial skin*

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*stooped posture*

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*depression or dementia*

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### **CAUSES, DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT**

The underlying cause of Parkinson's disease seems to be a deficiency in dopamine, the chemical that plays an important role in the transmission of nerve impulses in the brain. A tiny portion of the brain where dopamine is produced begins to degenerate. It's not yet known why this deficiency occurs. Parkinson's disease is incurable, but physical therapy, medications, surgery and emotional support can help slow and reduce the severity of the disease.

### **DON'T BE FOOLED**

There are conditions that mimic Parkinson's disease and make diagnosis difficult at times. Brain tumors or repeated head injuries often lead to a similar disruption of the nervous system. Strong tranquilizers and a few illegal drugs can also trigger Parkinson's-like symptoms.