

PARKINSON'S DISEASE

Parkinson's Disease (PD) occurs when brain cells that make dopamine, a chemical that coordinates movement, stop working or die. Because PD can cause tremor, slowness, stiffness, and walking and balance problems, it is called a "movement disorder." But constipation, depression, memory problems and other non-movement symptoms also can be part of Parkinson's. Parkinson's Disease is a lifelong and progressive disease, which means that symptoms slowly worsen over time.

The experience of living with Parkinson's over the course of a lifetime is unique to each person. As symptoms and progression vary from person to person, neither you nor your doctor can predict which symptoms you will get, when you will get them or how severe they will be. Even though broad paths of similarity are observed among individuals with PD as the disease progresses, there is no guarantee you will experience what you see in others.

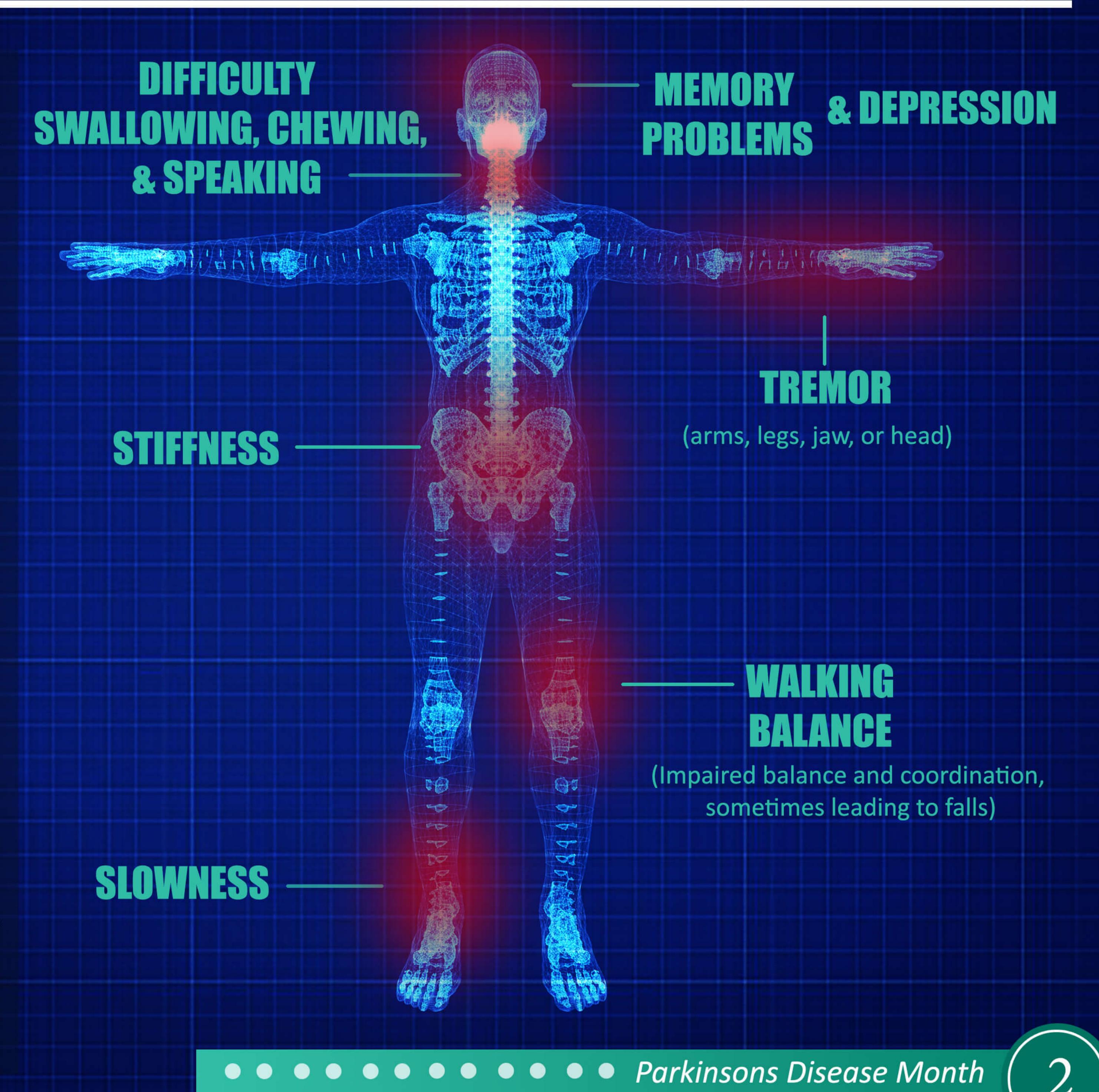


SYMPTOMS OF PARKINSONS DISEASE

People with Parkinson's disease often develop a parkinsonian gait that includes a tendency to lean forward; take small, quick steps; and reduce swinging their arms. They also may have trouble initiating or continuing movement.

Symptoms often begin on one side of the body or even in one limb on one side of the body. As the disease progresses, it eventually affects both sides. However, the symptoms may still be more severe on one side than on the other.

Many people with Parkinson's disease note that prior to experiencing stiffness and tremor, they had sleep problems, constipation, loss of smell, and restless legs. While some of these symptoms may also occur with normal aging, talk with your doctor if these symptoms worsen or begin to interfere with daily living.



TREATMENT OPTIONS

The main therapy for Parkinson's is levodopa. Nerve cells use levodopa to make dopamine to replenish the brain's dwindling supply. Usually, people take levodopa along with another medication called carbidopa. Carbidopa prevents or reduces some of the side effects of levodopa therapy — such as nausea, vomiting, low blood pressure, and restlessness — and reduces the amount of levodopa needed to improve symptoms.

People living with Parkinson's disease should never stop taking levodopa without telling their doctor. Suddenly stopping the drug may have serious side effects, like being unable to move or having difficulty breathing.

The doctor may prescribe other medicines to treat Parkinson's symptoms, including:

- Dopamine agonists to stimulate the production of dopamine in the brain
- Enzyme inhibitors (e.g., MAO-B inhibitors, COMT inhibitors) to the amount of dopamine slowing down the enzymes that break down dopamine in the brain
- Amantadine to help reduce involuntary movements
- Anticholinergic drugs to reduce tremors and muscle rigidity

For people with Parkinson's disease who do not respond well to medications, the doctor may recommend deep brain stimulation. During a surgical procedure, a doctor implants electrodes into part of the brain and connects them to a small electrical device implanted in the chest. The device and electrodes painlessly stimulate specific areas in the brain that control movement in a way that may help stop many of the movement-related symptoms of Parkinson's, such as tremor, slowness of movement, and rigidity.

