

AUGUST 2009

Keep Moving

Nina Brown

Parkinson's is a movement disorder, yet one of the least discussed "movement" problems is constipation. Although it can be a concern for anyone, it is a common complaint and a troublesome symptom for those living with Parkinson's. To make matters worse, the side effects of most of the drugs used for Parkinson's increase the tendency toward constipation.

The rigidity and slowness that occurs in Parkinson's also affects the muscles controlling the bowels. Because the bowels move slowly, stool moves slowly, and the fluid that's required for proper consistency dries out, making the stools hard. The longer the stool takes to pass through the bowel, the harder it becomes, and the more difficult it becomes to pass. Because it takes longer, one study defined constipation as *less frequent* bowel movements, rather than difficulty with defecation. It's not necessary for most

people to have a bowel movement every day. Three bowel movements per week is considered normal; whereas two or less per week is considered constipation.

Constipation occurs in 30% of people with Parkinson's. However, depending on the length and severity of their Parkinson's, 70% have difficulty completing a bowel movement and may strain or not completely evacuate.

Constipation should be well-managed otherwise chronic constipation can cause serious complications, such as:

- ⊗ Lethargy
- ⊗ Nausea and abdominal pain
- ⊗ Twisted or obstructed bowel
- ⊗ Bowel incontinence
- ⊗ Urinary incontinence caused by pressure against the bladder
- ⊗ Urinary tract infections

Constipation is easier to prevent than treat.

A few suggestions follow that might help ease your bowels and ease your mind.

☞ **Avoid unnecessary medicines** that contain substances known to cause constipation such as calcium and aluminum.

☞ **Get treatment** for any medical problem that may be contributing to the constipation, such as hemorrhoids.

Keep Moving, Continued

☞ **Dietary changes.** Dietary fiber is indigestible. If you don't have a problem chewing or swallowing, adding high fiber foods to your diet will increase the bulk of the stool and prevent constipation. If you do have a problem chewing or swallowing, try grating your food or use a blender to get the necessary roughage. Include the skin, where most of the fiber is found. At least two meals a day should include high-fiber foods such as grains and raw vegetables (carrots, cauliflower and broccoli) or nuts and dried fruits (raisins, prunes or apricots.) Some high-fiber snack foods are sesame bread sticks, date nut bread, oatmeal cookies, fig newtons, granola, raisin bars and corn chips. You can add fiber by sprinkling bran into applesauce or yogurt or on cereal; however, bran should be avoided if you have swallowing problems. Also, be aware if you add milk to cold cereal, the protein in the milk can compete with your Parkinson medications getting to the brain. Try hot oat bran cereal in the morning instead, which reduces the amount of protein, adds the needed bulk, and helps stimulate the gastrocolic reflex. Experiment with adding bran when cooking casseroles and eggs. You can also substitute 1-2 tablespoons of bran for each cup of flour when baking.

Don't increase dietary fiber too quickly or you'll risk bloating and abdominal cramps. If discomfort occurs, cut back your fiber intake, increase your fluids, and apply a hot water bottle to the abdomen and check with your doctor.

Avoid constipating foods like cheese, rice and bananas.

Prunes contain compounds believed to stimulate bowel contractions.

☞ **Massage** your belly regularly from the rib cage to the pubic bone.

☞ **Drink** six to eight 8-ounce glasses of water every day to help prevent "rock-like" stools. Hot liquids will often stimulate bowel activity. Avoid drinks that cause dehydration such as tea, coffee and alcohol. Drink as early in the day as possible so that you don't have to get up at night to urinate. Cut back on milk drinks, as milk can cause constipation in some people.

☞ **Increase your activity** level by exercising regularly. This will help stretch and strengthen the abdominal and pelvic muscles. Vigorous exercise isn't necessary, but just doing a few stretches or sit-ups isn't enough. Walking helps propel the stool into the lower intestine.

☞ **Good toilet habits.** When your body gives you the signal you need to go, don't postpone. Set aside a scheduled time of day, when you have time to relax and move your bowels. Sit comfortably on the commode, feet flat on the ground or possibly drawing up your knees. Never sit longer than 5 minutes or strain to pass hard stool. You don't want to risk getting hemorrhoids.

☞ **Laxatives** may diminish with continued use and some of the side effects can be serious. Be aware that any method of softening the stool does not give immediate results and is ineffective for chronic or severe constipation.

☞ **Enemas** or laxatives that stimulate can cause severe cramping and chronic use can deplete blood potassium levels and damage the bowel and should only be used as a last resort.

If simple measures don't work or if you have bloody bowel movements, pain, unexplained weight loss or you are still constipated after three weeks despite your best efforts, see your doctor to rule out more serious causes of your discomfort.



Ask the Advocate



Dear Advocate,

Q. *How many people have Parkinson's?*

Dear Reader,

A. *It has been estimated that 6.3 million people around the world have Parkinson's including 1 to 1.5 million Americans, affecting slightly more men than women. It is also estimated that 1 in 10 people are diagnosed before the age of 50 years with 15% before the age of 40 years. But these are only estimated numbers. The frustrating truth is that we don't really know how many people are living with Parkinson's or what else they have in common which is why advocates working with the Parkinson's Action Network (PAN) called upon legislators to create a national registry using information from existing databases that will answer these questions and more, hopefully leading to better treatments and a possible cure.*

If you are interested in learning more about PAN or have a question for Ask the Advocate, call 713-626-7114.

Just as running water does not freeze, so moving muscles do not freeze.

Exercise and activity are essential to maintain normal muscle tone and function. The Center for Neurologic Study suggests the following:

TEN BASIC EXERCISES FOR THOSE WITH PARKINSON'S

1. Bring the toes up with every step you take.
2. Spread your legs (10 inches) when walking or turning, to provide a wide base, a better stance and prevent falling. It may not look "beautiful," but neither does falling.
3. For greater safety in turning, use small steps, with your feet widely separated. Never cross one leg over the other when turning. Practice walking a few yards and turn. Then walk in the opposite direction and turn. Do this 15 minutes a day.
4. Practice walking into tight corners of a room to overcome fear of close places.
5. To insure good body balance, practice rapid excursions of the body. Backward, forward and to the right and left, five minutes, several times a day.
6. When your legs feel frozen or "glued" to the floor, lifting your toes will eliminate a muscle spasm and the fear of falling.
7. Swing your arms freely when walking. It helps to take body weight off your legs, lessens fatigue and loosens the arms and shoulders.
8. If getting out of a chair is difficult, rise quickly to overcome the pull of gravity. Sitting down should be done slowly, with your body bent sharply forward, until you touch the seat. Practice this a dozen times a day.
9. If your body lists to one side, carry a shopping bag loaded with books or other weights in the opposite hand to decrease the bend.
10. If you practice any task that is difficult, such as buttoning a shirt or getting out of bed, 20 times it day, it becomes easier the 21st time.



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Help HAPS conserve our environmental and financial resources. "Go Green" with us and get your copy of HAPS Happenings by e-mail. Get links to other PD information that you might also find interesting. Simply send your full name and email address to info@hapsonline.org. Your e-mail information will only be used for e-newsletter purposes and will not be distributed.



REMINDER

Don't miss the six-week meditation class
**Meditation, Mindfulness and Insight:
Ancient Wisdom for the Modern World**

September 22 - October 27
Call now to save your spot! 713-626-7114



HAPS Tomball Exercise Group

Join us for tai chi on Fridays
at our new location!

Tomball United Methodist Church
1603 Baker Dr.
Tomball, TX 77375
11:00 AM -12:00 PM



Caregiver support group meets the 1st Friday of the month
in conjunction with the exercise group



PD and TB

According to the World Health Organization, about 1.8 million people die worldwide each year from tuberculosis and a third of the world's population -- 2 billion people -- are infected.

Tests have shown that Parkinson's medications, Comtan and Tasmar which block the brain chemical COMT, also block a compound the tuberculosis bugs need. This is good news for the 9 million new cases of TB every year, of which about 490,000 are multiple-drug resistant.



You know you're into middle age when:

You realize that caution is the only thing you care to exercise!
Your wild oats have turned into prunes and All-Bran!



CONTRIBUTIONS

Your donation is very much appreciated. Your thoughtfulness helps HAPS continue to provide much needed services to people with Parkinson's and their families.

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IN HONOR OF

In honor of Louis Bernell's Birthday
Mr. and Mrs. Dan Pulaski

John "Jack" Evans
Charlotte's Saddlery

In honor of George A. Bourgeois III
Mr. & Mrs. George A. Bourgeois Jr.

IN MEMORY OF

In memory of Doris Perryman
Madeline and James Kelley

In memory of Gaynell Akin
Monte R. Lee

~ Your donation is tax deductible ~

SAVE THE DATE



Houston Area Parkinson Society
2009 Annual Awards Event
6 pm Sunday, October 4, 2009
Bayou Club
Chairs: Ellen and Frank Donnelly

2009 Honorees

Houston Ballet will be honored with the Roy H. Cullen Quality of Life Award in recognition of having helped improve the quality of life for people living with Parkinson's disease through its partnership with HAPS making the Houston Ballet - HAPS Dance for Parkinson's program possible.

Baine P. Kerr, Sr. will be honored posthumously with the Lillie Cullen Quality of Life Award presented in recognition of having lived life with outstanding purpose and dignity amid the challenges of being diagnosed with Parkinson's disease.

HAPS HAPPENINGS

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HAPS HAPPENINGS is published monthly by Houston Area Parkinson Society Editor: Nina P. Brown

HAPS does not provide diagnosis or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or pharmacist with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition or drug interactions.