



Parkinson's Disease Information Sheet 2.12

Employment and Parkinson's

Idiopathic Parkinson's disease is a progressive neurological condition that is characterised by motor (movement) and non-motor symptoms.

The most common symptoms are:

- tremor
- bradykinesia (slowness of movement)
- muscle rigidity
- postural instability.

Many other symptoms may or may not develop – each person with Parkinson's can present differently.

Many people develop Parkinson's while they are in the workforce, and aim to remain employed. With understanding and adjustments from colleagues and employers this may be possible. This is not only a financial benefit but also enhances feelings of independence and self-esteem.

With medication and ongoing support, productive and rewarding employment following diagnosis may be possible.

An assessment of the work environment by an occupational therapist will be beneficial.

Disclosure

Generally there is no legal obligation to disclose the diagnosis of Parkinson's unless there is an occupational health and safety risk. However, disclosure may be positive as it may explain visible problems, and also lessen stress levels that arise from attempting to disguise symptoms. Discussion with your treating specialist may assist with the decision.

Remaining in Control

Whichever decision is made (disclosure or not) it is vital to maintain as much control of your future as possible. Initially symptoms are mild therefore major lifestyle changes

can be avoided. This allows for a time of adjustment and planning with realistic expectations. This may be a time to consider and plan for part-time employment. If premature retirement is unavoidable, advice from Centrelink and/or a financial advisor is recommended.

Work Related Parkinson's Symptoms

Fatigue is a major symptom of Parkinson's and may impact on your ability to work full-time.

Bradykinesia may result in difficulty in maintaining deadlines and schedules. In this area understanding and cooperation from the employer will be of great benefit.

Stress and increased anxiety may worsen symptoms such as tremor. Relaxation and stress reduction techniques may be of benefit.

Handwriting may become smaller and less legible. Tremor and bradykinesia may interfere with keyboard skills. Advice from an occupational therapist may assist.

Reduced speech volume and vocal changes may impact on telephone and office dialogue. Speech therapy may be beneficial in maintaining optimum communication.

The ability to multi-task may be impaired and this must be recognized and taken into consideration. Completing one task before starting another and maintaining an uncluttered work environment will assist.

Postural instability and mobility changes will impact on more physical types of occupations.

Consideration of occupational health and safety for yourself and your colleagues must take priority.

Disability Employment Services

This is a government funded service that may assist with finding and maintaining employment. If you are already employed and have been working for a period greater than 13 weeks, you may be eligible for specific assistance in maintaining current employment. In this instance you are able to contact the Disability Employment Service directly. This can be accessed through the 'Find a Provider' section of the Australian JobSearch website www.jobsearch.gov.au.

CRS Australia

This is a Federal government service (formerly known as Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service). It is a provider of disability employment and assessment services for people with a health condition and for employers. Self-referral can be carried out via the website www.crsaaustralia.gov.au.

Parkinson's and Employment Discrimination

In addition to Federal legislation, each state and territory has specific rulings to address the needs of both the employee and employer in cases where disability impacts on employment. Individual advice should be sought from the relevant authority.

Workers' compensation legislation may apply in some circumstances.

Other sources of information are:

- Parkinson's Victoria – Work, Superannuation and Parkinson's Disease
- Parkinson's Victoria – Disability Employment Services
- Parkinson's Victoria – Making Decisions About Work
www.parkinsonsvic.org.au
- Parkinson's Disease Society (UK) – Employment Guide
www.parkinsons.org.uk

Parkinson's New South Wales is currently producing a publication on employment and Parkinson's

Studies suggest that people with Parkinson's are likely to give up employment within ten years of diagnosis.

Reaching a decision to leave employment may not necessarily result in a negative outcome. Many people living with Parkinson's find that the subsequent reduction in stress associated with full-time employment is of benefit.

For further information please contact your state Parkinson's organisation: FREECALL 1800 644 189

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