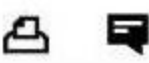


LIFESTYLE

A Look at New Treatments for Parkinson’s Disease

By Lifestyle on August 13, 2019 at 1:44 PM



Parkinson’s disease (PD) is the second most **common age-related neuro-disorder**, falling right behind Alzheimer’s disease. In a recent study by the **Michael J Fox Institute**, it’s estimated that over one million Americans are living with the disease today. There are an estimated seven to 10 million people afflicted worldwide.

With such a far-reaching disease, it’s encouraging to know that there are many promising new treatments for Parkinson’s disease today. Learn more about these recent Parkinson’s breakthroughs that are changing the lives of millions – for the better.

What is Parkinson’s Disease?

Parkinson’s disease is a neurological disorder that happens when brain neurons begin to die. Neurons produce a chemical called Dopamine. Dopamine regulates your body’s physical movements as well as learning and attention spans.

When your brain produces less dopamine, you lose your physical coordination to walk or stay balanced. Parkinson’s patients also lose neurotransmitters that produce a chemical called Norepinephrine. Norepinephrine controls automatic body functions such as blood pressure and heart rate.

Both women and men can suffer from Parkinson’s disease. Men, however, are **50% more likely** to have Parkinson’s than women.

Some researchers believe Parkinson’s is an inherited disease. Other studies believe that the disease attacks patients randomly. There is a growing body of science that now believes that Parkinson’s is a combination of genetics as well as exposure to environmental hazards. These hazards include exposure to contaminates.

Age is the most obvious risk factor for patients who contract Parkinson’s. Most patients are diagnosed with the disease in their early 60’s. Between 5 and 10 percent of these Parkinson’s patients were diagnosed with **early-onset symptoms** before they turned 50.

Signs of Parkinson’s Disease

There are four main motor indicators of Parkinson’s disease. These symptoms include:

- Impaired physical coordination and balance
- Trembling legs, head, arms, hands or jaw
- Slow movements
- Stiff arms, legs or trunk

Parkinson’s symptoms will appear gradually and then become more severe over time. As the disease advances, patients will also experience other non-motor system difficulties like behavioral changes or memory loss. Other symptoms might include problems chewing and swallowing or sleeping disruptions.

Parkinson’s symptoms and their progression rate will vary amongst patients. Some individuals misinterpret early signs of Parkinson’s as side effects of the aging process.

There are currently no definitive medical tests that can accurately identify the disease. That’s why diagnosis is difficult.

The primary medication therapy for Parkinson’s patients is called **Levodopa, or L-dopa**. Levodopa can replenish the diminished dopamine levels that our brain’s neurons originally supply. Patients will pair L-dopa with another medication called carbidopa that reduces L-dopa side effects like nausea or vomiting.

New Treatments for Parkinson’s Disease

Is there a cure for Parkinson’s disease? Unfortunately, the medical community still doesn’t know what causes neurons to stop producing dopamine.

The medical community has been forced to try new treatments for Parkinson’s. And the results are promising. Here are just a few of them:

Glial Cell Line-Derived Neurotrophic Factor (GDNF)

Glial Cell Line-Derived Neurotrophic Factors (GDNF) are proteins that support brain cells. GDNF also promotes neuron growth, the cells that Parkinson’s is so ably destroying.

GDNF can be administered orally. But a team of researchers from Canada and Britain found a more direct route to administer GDNF – directly to the human brain.

Between 2013 to 2016, **a research cohort** from the University of Bristol, University of British Columbia, and Cardiff University sponsored a groundbreaking study. They observed patients who received GDNF through ports implanted directly into their skulls.

This trial period lasted for 40 weeks. Half of the trial patients received monthly GDNF doses directly through skull portals while the remaining half received a placebo through the same skull portal.

Patients who received GDNF treatment through skull portals had a 100% improvement in dopamine-producing activity. These positive results proved that many drugs might not work because they can’t penetrate the bloodstream that leads into the brain.

Istradefylline

One challenge in the fight for a new treatment for Parkinson’s revolves around “motor fluctuations.” “Motor fluctuations” center around “on” periods where patients will respond positively to treatment. “Off” periods show where patient negative symptoms will reappear while the patient is still undergoing treatment.

One medication that shortened “off” periods is the drug Istradefylline. This medication is best for patients with early symptoms of Parkinson’s who have not yet experienced motor decline.

Deep Brain Stimulation

Another treatment to fight off Parkinson’s disease is called **deep brain stimulation** or DBS. DBS is a surgical process that reduces tremors and blocks involuntary movements in patients. Doctors implant a device that delivers electrical shocks to the brain to erode the blocks to the patient’s motor system.

DBS has been successful in improving motor system functions. DBS also shows promising effects on other systems like depression or anxiety. DBS has also shown beneficial impacts on solving sleep disturbances as well.

Nordic Walking

Nordic walking is a strenuous exercise that is characterized by using walking poles to march across a challenging route. **Nordic pole walking** involves using upper body muscles during your trek that wouldn’t normally be used during a hike.

Nordic Walking poles are positioned behind your body at 45-degree angles to help you push forward on your upper limbs. Using your upper body this way also helps you build your core muscles as well. The Nordic Walking method was created by the International Nordic Walking Association (INWA.)

This organization encourages members to focus on stride length, heel strike and posture while walking. Nordic walking poles can help support balance and coordination necessary for a steady walking pattern.

Next Steps

Do any of these new treatments for Parkinson’s Disease sound encouraging to you? If you are a recent victim of Parkinson’s, be sure to talk to your physician about the available medication and deep brain stimulation therapies that are available to you today.

Maybe your first step is to experiment with Nordic walking. This process can help increase your coordination and improve your gait.

Be sure to **check out our website** for more helpful advice on living your best, healthiest life!



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