

Top Questions and Answers from NPF's "Ask the Doctor" Forum

Summer is here and in this issue we focus on commonly asked questions about Parkinson's disease (PD) from our "Ask the Doctor" and "Ask the Pharmacist" forums.

We encourage all patients, caregivers and friends of the Parkinson's community to start a dialogue with us and take advantage of this free online resource at www.parkinson.org/forums.



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Q I have Parkinson's disease and I notice that I often feel dizzy when I stand up. What could be causing this and what can I do?

A There's a name for that dizziness you get when you go from laying down or sitting to standing up. It's called orthostatic hypotension and it commonly occurs in people with PD. The phenomenon manifests when your blood pressure drops a certain number of points upon standing, and it commonly leads to dizziness and possibly passing out. It results from damage to the autonomic nervous system. In other words, there are nerves in your body that must perform daily automatic functions such as regulation of blood pressure, and Parkinson's may attack those nerves. Your dizziness may be associated with your PD, your Parkinson's medications, or both. You should consult with your doctor immediately and have your blood pressure taken while laying down, sitting and standing.

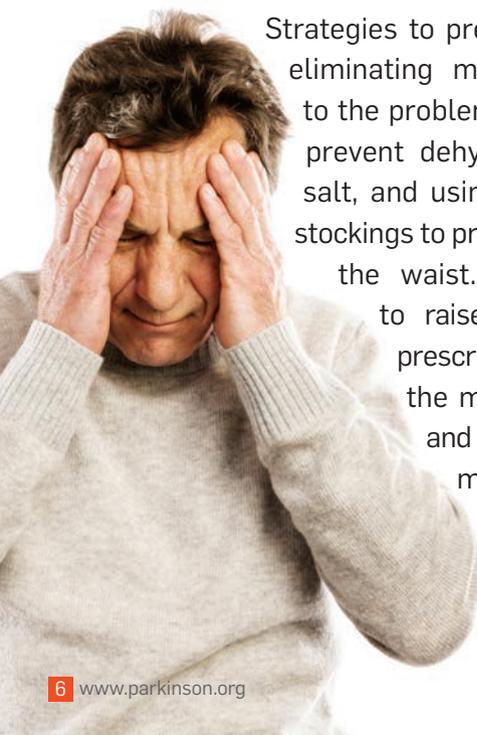
Strategies to prevent this problem include: eliminating medications that contribute to the problem, increasing fluid intake to prevent dehydration, increasing dietary salt, and using tight, thigh-high support stockings to prevent pooling of blood below the waist. Additionally, medications to raise blood pressure may be prescribed (midodrine or floriene are the most commonly prescribed), and in some cases blood pressure medications may be reduced or even stopped. Finally, the new FDA-approved drug droxidopa (Northera) may

provide many PD patients with another option for the treatment of orthostatic hypotension when it becomes available in the coming months.

Q I often find myself out of breath when talking or walking around the house. Is this just a progression of Parkinson's disease, and is there anything I can do to get rid of this symptom?

A In many cases, this breathlessness is actually a symptom of the "wearing off" phenomenon which may occur as a result of the Parkinson's medications not lasting until the next dose is due. Interestingly, both motor and non-motor symptoms can reappear just before your next scheduled levodopa or dopaminergic dose. A good first step is to talk with your doctor about optimizing your medications. You may discover that you might not be taking enough dopaminergic medication or you may not be taking it at frequent enough intervals.

In other cases, shortness of breath can be triggered by Parkinson's-related anxiety. Fortunately, in people with PD this anxiety can often be addressed by simply moving medication doses closer together without increasing the dose. Anxiety and shortness of breath should also be addressed with the aid of a psychiatrist who can work in concert with your neurologist. Ask your doctor about two or three hour dosing intervals. You may also benefit from a consultation with a speech-language pathologist. Of course, we recommend that you see your primary care doctor to investigate other causes of shortness of breath such as cardiac and lung problems, but in many cases one of the above mentioned issues is the reason underpinning the shortness of breath.



Ask the Pharmacist

Q I often feel anxious a few hours after taking my medications. What is causing this anxiety and how can I ease it?

A Sometimes the source of anxiety is obvious: It can come from the thought of an embarrassing situation happening at a party, at work or out to eat. Other times, it's not always clear. But it's one of the most common things people ask me. For people with PD, the fear of having a Parkinson's-related episode in public and not having medication on hand has a lot to do with the anxiety they experience.



Mark Comes, RPh.

But remember, you should be in control of Parkinson's, and not the other way around. That's the mindset you need to adopt in order to counteract these anxious feelings. Parkinson's symptoms are usually cyclical, meaning they happen around the same time every day or they become worse in stressful situations. Here are some tips that may help you reduce anxiety:

- ➔ **Carry Parkinson's medications with you at all times.** Even though you may take medication only once a day, knowing you have these drugs with you may help you feel more in control.
- ➔ **Ask your doctor to prescribe a low dose Sinemet.** Sometimes these anxiety "attacks" can bring out your symptoms. Taking a low rescue dose of regular acting Sinemet may relieve your symptoms quickly.
- ➔ **Practice meditation.** For alleviating mild anxiety, try setting aside time each day to meditate.
- ➔ **Consider taking an antidepressant.** If these anxiety attacks become severe and debilitating, talk to your doctor. Many antidepressants are very effective for treating anxiety and can be a better option than anti-anxiety drugs.
- ➔ **Learn about the drugs and combinations of drugs that can cause anxiety symptoms in people with PD.** Download a free copy of NPF's newly revised "Medications" book at www.parkinson.org/books.

The information published in this "Ask the Doctor" Forum is not intended to replace, and should not be interpreted or relied upon, as professional advice, whether medical or otherwise. Accordingly, please consult your own professional for all advice concerning medical, legal, or other matters published in connection with this Forum. NPF assumes no liability of any kind for the content of any information transmitted to or received by any individual or entity in connection with their use of the "Ask the Doctor" Forum on the NPF Web site, and NPF does not endorse or recommend any such information.

Tips for Daily Living— Preventing Falls



This is the time of year when you probably will probably spend more time on the move. This is also a time of year when falls can happen when you're traveling, gardening or picnicking with family and friends. Here are some helpful tips to prevent falls this summer and beyond.

- ✔ **Try Tai Chi.** Research shows that these flowing moves help with balance and reduce the risk of falling. Look for classes offered at community centers and hospitals.
- ✔ **Get strong.** It's also important to keep your core—the abdominals, chest and back muscles—strong as well as your lower body to protect yourself against falls. Work with a physical therapist to determine what you need.
- ✔ **Do something every day.** Stretch in the morning, move around while you're talking on the phone or take a walk with a friend.
- ✔ **Be aware.** The most important risk factor for falling is a prior fall. Avoid doing things that put you at risk in the first place like multitasking when walking or lifting heavy objects.
- ✔ **Call NPF's Helpline.** If you have questions or need more information on preventing falls, call 1-800-4PD-INFO (473-4636) or e-mail helpline@parkinson.org.