

Stages of Parkinson's: What to Expect as a Care Partner

Stage 1 - this stage is the earliest stage of Parkinson's Disease. This is when the disease is at its mildest and typically will only affect one side of the body. Many of the changes that are happening during this phase go unnoticed by the person with Parkinson's and *typically do not impact daily tasks and activities*. As a care partner, you may notice

- decreased use of facial expressions
- mild changes in walking such as decreased arm swing and slower steps
- slight tremors on one side of the body

Stage 2 - this stage of Parkinson's is also fairly mild by symptoms may now be affecting both sides of the body, although one side may be affected more than the other. The person with Parkinson's may start to be bothered by their symptoms but will continue to be able to complete their daily tasks and activities. As a care partner, you may notice:

- Increased tremors
- Stiffness or rigidity
- Continued changes in posture
- Continued changes in walking - small steps, freezing

As a care partner, you can expect:

- longer lengths of time needed for your loved one to complete daily tasks

Stage 3 – this stage is known as the moderate stage of Parkinson's. Symptoms of stage 2 continue to may progress slightly but stage 3 is hallmarked by difficulties with balance. As a care partner, you may notice:

- Tremors
- Stiffness or rigidity
- Decreased posture control
- Changes in walking, shuffling and freezing of steps
- Decreased balance
- Increased falls
- Poor reflexes
- Smaller and slower movements

As a care partner, you may need to:

- remove loose rugs and other tripping hazards from the home
- help your loved one with fine motor tasks such as securing buttons, using zippers, and writing
- move frequently used items to lower cabinets, shelves, or onto counters for easier access
- introduce assistive devices for every day tasks like eating and dressing
- simplify tasks when you can such as using electronic tooth brushes and automatic soap dispensers
- seek physical, occupational, and/or speech therapy services for your loved one
- take over household tasks such as cleaning, laundry, cooking, maintenance, and financial management. However, your loved one may still be able to help with these tasks within their ability level.
- possibly take over all driving

Stage 4 - this is a more advanced stage of Parkinson's where symptoms are fully developed and affect every aspect of the person's life. Most people in this stage tend to need a walker or cane to get around safely. Independence is severely affected in this stage as daily tasks and activities become more difficult, and are unsafe, to complete independently. People with Parkinson's will rely more on their caregiver at this stage. Symptoms at this stage are the same as in stage 3 but are just further progressed:

- Decreased overall motor skills such as slower and smaller movements
- Decreased balance and Increased falls

As a care partner, you may need to:

- help your loved one with dressing, bathing, and eating
- adapt your home to accommodate for walker or cane
- fully take over household tasks such as cleaning, laundry, cooking, home maintenance, and financial management
- fully take over driving
- provide supervision at all times for safety in the home
- provide memory assistance for your loved one such as helping them remember to take their medications or to drink enough water
- provide physical assistance to help your loved one get up from the couch, bed, chair, and/or car
- make modifications to you home such as possibly adding grab bars in hallways and in the bathroom, installing a walk-in shower, adding ramps to replace outdoor steps, and removing cabinets underneath counters to accommodate a wheelchair rolling underneath them.

Stage 5 – this is the most advanced stage of Parkinson’s Disease. Increased stiffness, changes in walking, and decreased balance in this stage may make it difficult, if not impossible, for the individual with Parkinson’s to stand or walk. Many people at this stage require the use of a wheelchair to move around their environment and community. The person at this stage will be reliant on their caregiver for most, if not all, daily tasks and activities. Stage five also brings increases in non-motor symptoms such as:

- Hallucinations
- Delusions
- Dementia symptoms

As a care partner, you may need to:

- adapt your home to accommodate a wheelchair
- provide increased assistance, or total support, for all daily tasks and activities
- provide increased memory support for your loved one
- be prepared for increased hallucinations and delusions. Try to work with a mental health provider to learn some strategies you can use to help your loved one through hallucinations and delusions.