

What your body is telling you about the health of your brain.



(NC) Scientists know that age is the biggest risk factor for developing brain diseases, like dementia, Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. Today, about six million people worldwide live with Parkinson's, including 100,000 Canadians and that number is expected to double by the year 2040 due to an aging population.

Many people are aware of the common symptoms of Parkinson's; tremors, loss of coordination, difficulty speaking and other movement issues. However, every experience is different and there are several lesser-known symptoms and indicators that may appear years or decades before an official diagnosis, such as smell loss, depression, anxiety, fatigue, difficulty focusing and acting out your dreams.

The uniqueness of the Parkinson's experience and the variety of symptoms can make it that much more difficult for people to receive a diagnosis. This lag not only delays when people start treatment, but it's estimated that as many as 80 per cent of cells producing dopamine, a brain chemical that fuels movement, mood and more, may be damaged by the time of an official Parkinson's diagnosis.

So, if you have symptoms, it is important to speak to a doctor. If diagnosed, a movement disorder specialist (a neurologist with additional training in

Parkinson's) can help provide care and develop an individualized treatment plan.

Currently, there is no cure for brain diseases like Parkinson's, Alzheimer's or dementia and there are no treatments to slow or stop the progression. However, researchers are working to better understand how these diseases develop, who gets them and why. Today, there are great strides being made.

For example, The Michael J. Fox Foundation's landmark brain health study, the Parkinson's Progression Markers Initiative (PPMI), has launched in certain cities across Canada. The program aims to rewrite the future of Parkinson's disease and brain health in general, by better understanding predictors of it. The goal is to help detect the disease earlier and, ultimately, understand it better to find a cure.

While the study is primarily interested in those recently diagnosed with Parkinson's and not yet taking medication, there's also an opportunity for those over age 60 without Parkinson's disease who have lost their sense of smell or are acting out their dreams while asleep (REM sleep behaviour disorder). Those over age 60 without a known connection to Parkinson's can become a control volunteer as well.

Find more information or learn how to get involved at michaelfox.org/ppmi.

New smell test helping detect brain disease

(NC) The sense of smell is a powerful part of the human experience. It influences taste and even triggers emotions and memories. If your sense of smell is reduced or you've lost it completely that could be an early indicator of brain disease.

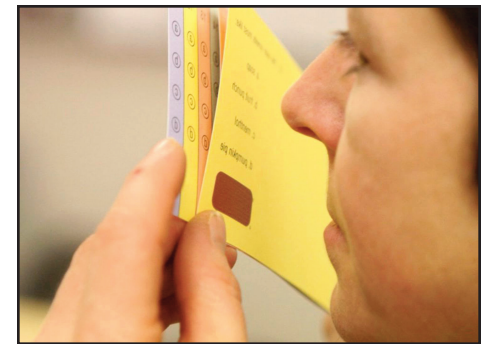
The nose knows. While temporary loss of smell is often linked to having a cold, COVID-19 or a respiratory virus, ongoing and progressive smell loss may be one of the most important signals of brain health and an early indicator for Parkinson's disease.

According to a research study sponsored by The Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research (MJFF), up to 30 per cent of people experiencing smell loss have shown brain changes associated with Parkinson's disease, a chronic, neurodegenerative disease that affects an estimated six million people worldwide and over 100,000 Canadians.

What's more, smell loss can happen years or even decades before traditional Parkinson's symptoms appear, including tremors or difficulty with balance. However, studies have shown it can be surprisingly difficult to identify smell loss, seven in 10 people living with it didn't know until they were tested.

A scratch-and-sniff test to the rescue. While scientists are hard at work trying to understand why smell loss occurs with Parkinson's, they all agree that it could be an important part in understanding the disease, including who's at risk, who gets it, who doesn't and why.

There is a simple screening tool to



Ongoing and progressive smell loss may be an important signal of brain health and an early indicator for Parkinson's disease.

measure the risk for brain disease, a scientist-developed scratch-and-sniff smell test, which is available to all Canadians over 60 living without Parkinson's. The free test, which can be ordered and delivered right to your door, involves 40 multiple-choice scratch-and-sniff questions. Answers are submitted online and the results have the potential to change the understanding of brain disease.

Smell tests and the evolution of Parkinson's. Results are analyzed by scientists and may lead to the submitter being asked to join a landmark brain health study, the Parkinson's Progression Markers Initiative (PPMI), now in Canada. The global study seeks to enroll 100,000 participants with and without the disease, working with people both in-person and online, to provide insights into Parkinson's disease, including the link between smell loss and brain health.

Not everyone with smell loss will go on to develop brain disease, but everyone can play a role in helping find better treatments, cures and even ways to prevent brain disease altogether.

Find out more about the smell test at mysmelltest.org/canada.

Are you acting out your dreams while sleeping?



How you sleep can be an early indicator for later health issues.

(NC) We all know how important sleep is to our mental and physical health, but how you sleep can be an early indicator for later health issues. If someone has noticed that you act out your dreams, especially yelling, punching, kicking or getting out of bed, you may be living with rapid-eye movement (REM) sleep behaviour disorder, also known as RBD.

During normal REM, the time when we dream, the brain prevents movement. But for those with RBD, brain pathways are disrupted and people are able to act out their dreams.

People with the condition often have very active dreams in which they're playing sports, running or even being chased or attacked.

Sleep problems, including this one, are common in people diagnosed with

Parkinson's disease. Although not everyone with RBD develops Parkinson's, studies suggest a strong link between having the condition and a future diagnosis of Parkinson's or related conditions. RBD can occur years before more well-known symptoms, such as tremors, stiffness or slowness. Other possible early signs of Parkinson's include constipation, depression and smell loss.

If you have symptoms, including acting out your dreams, talk to your doctor. Other sleep problems may mimic RBD, so it's important for a sleep specialist to confirm the diagnosis. Once diagnosed, a movement disorder specialist (a neurologist with expertise in Parkinson's disease and other movement disorders) can help provide care and offer an individualized treatment plan.

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BEST WISHES FOR THE Autumn Holidays & Celebrations

Sept. 22-24 – Rosh Hashanah
Sept. 30 – National Day for Truth and Reconciliation
Oct. 1-2 – Yom Kippur
Oct. 13 – Thanksgiving
Oct. 20 – Diwali
Nov. 11 – Remembrance Day