

Parkinson's Disease Dementia (PDD): A Guide for Patient's & Families

Parkinson's Disease Dementia (PDD) is a condition that can develop in people who have had Parkinson's disease for several years. It occurs when changes in the brain begin to affect thinking, memory, behavior, and daily functioning in addition to movement symptoms. Parkinson's disease primarily affects movement, but over time it may also impact cognitive abilities and behavior.

Signs & Symptoms to Watch For

Common Cognitive Symptoms

- Slowed thinking and difficulty processing information
- Problems with attention and concentration
- Difficulty planning, organizing, or multitasking
- Memory problems, particularly recalling recent events
- Visuospatial difficulties (trouble judging distances or navigating spaces)

Behavioral & Neurologic Changes

- Visual hallucinations
- Sleep disturbances or vivid dreams
- Depression, anxiety, or apathy
- Increased confusion later in the day
- Worsening Parkinsonian symptoms such as tremor, stiffness, and slowed movement

Typical Presentation & Progression

Early Stage

- Mild changes in thinking or problem-solving
- Subtle memory changes
- Difficulty with multitasking or complex tasks
- Movement symptoms of Parkinson's disease already present

Middle Stage

- Increasing cognitive impairment
- Greater difficulty managing daily activities
- Hallucinations or behavioral symptoms may develop
- Need for increasing supervision or assistance

Late Stage

- Significant cognitive impairment
- Severe movement difficulties
- Difficulty communicating clearly
- Full dependence on caregivers for daily care

Medications FDA-Approved for Cognitive Symptoms

Symptom-Targeted Medications

- Rivastigmine (Exelon®) — FDA-approved for Parkinson's disease dementia
- Donepezil (Aricept®) — sometimes used off-label to help cognitive symptoms
- Galantamine (Razadyne®) — occasionally used off-label

Medications for Movement or Behavioral Symptoms

- Carbidopa/levodopa — helps improve Parkinsonian motor symptoms
- Melatonin — may help with sleep disturbances
- Antipsychotic medications such as quetiapine or pimavanserin may be used cautiously for hallucinations or psychosis

Diagnostic Tests Your Healthcare Team May Use

Clinical & Cognitive Evaluation

- Detailed medical history and symptom review
- Cognitive screening tests such as the Montreal Cognitive Assessment (MoCA)
- Neurological examination assessing movement symptoms

Laboratory Tests

- Blood tests to rule out other causes of cognitive symptoms
- Thyroid testing, vitamin deficiencies, and metabolic evaluations

Imaging Studies

- MRI or CT scans — rule out stroke, tumor, or structural problems
- In some cases, specialized imaging may be used to support diagnosis

Planning for the Future

Healthcare Planning

- Discuss goals of care early while the person can still express preferences.
- Establish advance directives and healthcare power of attorney.
- Consider specialty dementia care as symptoms progress.

Legal & Financial Planning

- Assign durable financial power of attorney.
- Review insurance coverage and long-term care planning.
- Consider consulting elder-law professionals when appropriate.

Support for Caregivers

- Both movement and cognitive symptoms can create caregiving challenges.
- Establish routines and seek respite care when possible.
- Support groups and caregiver education can be very helpful.

National Organizations & Resources

✓ Parkinson's Foundation

☎ 800-473-4636 | 🌐 parkinson.org — education, support services, and research information.

✓ Alzheimer's Association 24/7 Helpline

☎ 800-272-3900 | 🌐 alz.org — dementia education and caregiver support.

✓ National Institute on Aging (NIA)

☎ 800-438-4380 | 🌐 nia.nih.gov — research and educational resources.

✓ Eldercare Locator

☎ 1-800-677-1116 | 🌐 eldercare.acl.gov — connects families with local aging services.

Final Notes

- Parkinson's Disease Dementia usually develops several years after Parkinson's disease begins.
- Early recognition helps families prepare for cognitive and caregiving challenges.
- Support for caregivers is essential for maintaining quality of life.