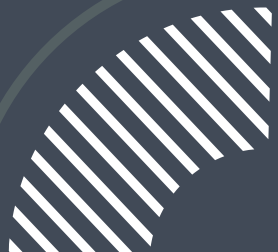


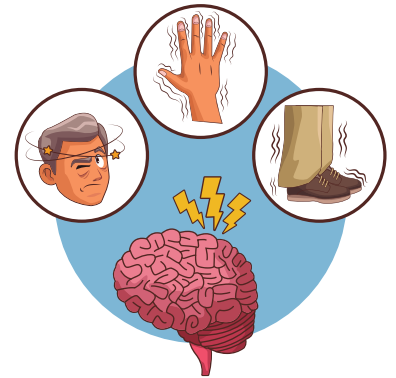
# PARKINSON'S DISEASE PATIENT GUIDE

Buffalo Occupational Therapy



# Overview of Parkinson's Disease

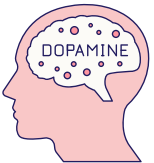
Parkinson's disease is a condition that **slowly affects how the brain works**. It's not something that usually shortens your life, but it can make daily life harder over time. It can cause problems with how you **move** and how you **think**, which means it can affect many parts of your day—from walking and talking to planning or remembering things.



## Key Facts:



**It Changes Over Time:** Parkinson's is a condition that gets more noticeable as time goes on. It can affect how you move and how you think.



**It's About Dopamine:** Parkinson's makes it harder for your brain to make dopamine—a chemical that helps control your movements. This is why many people take medicine like levodopa to help their body move better.



**Lewy Bodies May Be Involved:** Some people with Parkinson's also have changes in the brain called Lewy bodies. These can make thinking or memory problems worse.

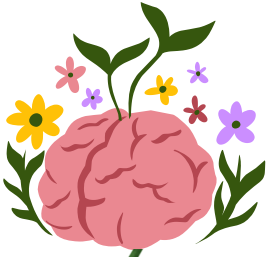


**Medicine Helps Manage Symptoms:** Medications can't cure Parkinson's, but they can help with symptoms by improving how your brain uses dopamine.



**It Can Affect Daily Life:** Learning about Parkinson's can help you stay independent longer. Occupational therapy and other supports can help you keep doing the things that matter to you.

# Understand the Progression of Parkinson's Disease



Parkinson's doesn't change overnight. It moves slowly and affects people differently. Knowing what to expect can help you **stay one step ahead**. Think of it like walking down a path—each stage may bring new challenges, but there are ways to **adjust and stay in control**.

1

**Small Hints:** You might notice a tremor or slowness, but only on one side of your body. It's easy to miss at first.

2

**Both Sides Get Involved:** Symptoms now show up on both sides (like both arms or legs), but your balance is still pretty good. Movements may just feel slower or stiffer.

3

**Some Wobbles:** You may have trouble with balance, like turning quickly or getting up from a chair, but you can still do most things on your own.

4

**More Support Needed:** Moving and staying steady gets harder. You may still walk or stand, but you might need help with daily tasks.

5

**Full Support Required:** At this point, you might need a wheelchair or help getting around. But even then, good care, movement, and routines can still make life meaningful.

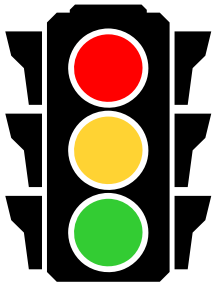
# Take Action to Remain in Control

If you notice any of these warning signs, here's what you can do right away to stay in control and support your body and mind.

Warning Sign	Action Step
Your back and neck are always bent forward	Practice daily posture stretches; ask your therapist for posture-focused drills
You're moving slower or feel "stuck" in place	Use a rhythmic cue like a metronome or music beat to get moving
You notice more shaking, even at rest	Track when it happens; bring notes to your doctor to adjust medication
You feel more off balance turning or reaching	Work on balance training with a therapist (e.g., step-tap, standing drills)
You're freezing in doorways or tight spaces	Set visual targets (like floor lines) and use external cues to initiate steps
You feel stiffer in the morning or after sitting	Begin a gentle stretching and warm-up routine daily
Medication doesn't last as long as it used to	Log symptoms and talk to your neurologist—adjustments may be needed
You feel more confused or foggy than usual	Add brain challenges (puzzles, memory games) + movement for dual-task training
You're avoiding outings or areas of your home	Reassess your environment with your therapist to remove barriers
You're more tired or anxious about changes	Ask your care team for energy pacing strategies and mental health support



# What is going on with the Dopamine?



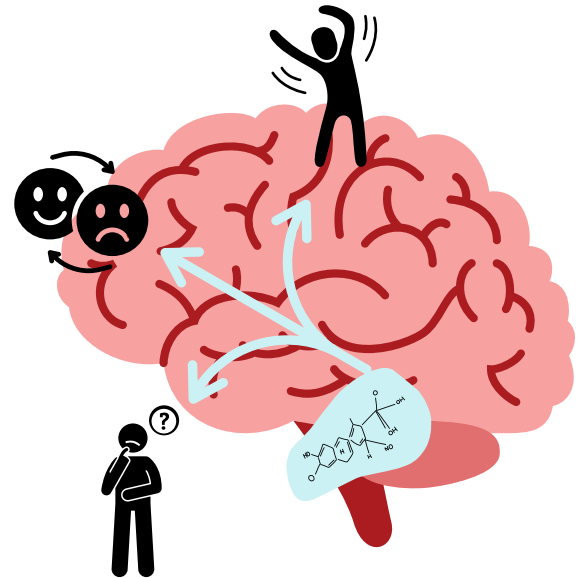
## Dopamine Helps You Move and Think

Dopamine is a brain chemical that acts like a **messenger**. It helps your brain send signals that control **movement, mood, motivation, and thinking**.

## What's going on in the brain?

Dopamine is made in deep parts of the brain and sends it to other important regions like:

- **The Basal Ganglia** – helps control movement and coordination
- **The Prefrontal Cortex** – helps with attention, decision-making, emotional regulation, and memory



## When happens to Dopamine in Parkinson's Disease?

The brain cells that make dopamine start to break down.

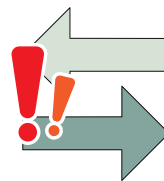
### What does this feel like?



**Movement gets slower and stiffer**



**Hands or jaw might feel shaky ("tremor")**



**It's harder to start moving or change direction**



**Thinking clearly can be more difficult**



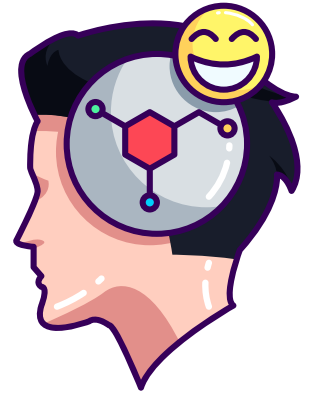
## What may help?

- Medication to replace dopamine
- Exercise and movement therapy
- Brain-stimulating activities

# Brain Training, Lifestyle, and Dopamine

Your brain changes every day—especially in response to what you do, feel, and pay attention to. That's called neuroplasticity.

Just like physical exercise builds muscle, brain training and lifestyle modifications can build your ability to focus, remember, and problem-solve. But brain training isn't just worksheets—it's about **activating the right brain chemicals** that help your neurons connect and grow.



## The Power of Dopamine



Dopamine is your brain's “**get up and go**” chemical. It plays a role in:

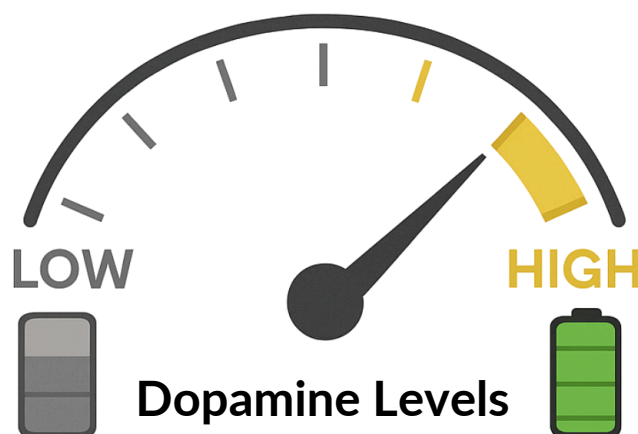
- ✓ Attention
- ✓ Motivation
- ✓ Learning
- ✓ Goal-directed behavior
- ✓ Memory formation

When dopamine levels are higher, your brain becomes more ready to notice, remember, and act.

## Why does dopamine matter to you?

### Low Dopamine

- Brain fog
- Procrastination
- Poor Memory
- Low Motivation
- Fatigue



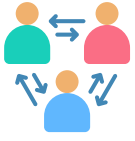
### High Dopamine

- Focused **attention**
- Follow-through
- Mental clarity
- Motivation
- Mood improvement



# How do I naturally boost my dopamine levels?

## Social Interaction



- Low-pressure hangouts, phone calls, or quick conversations
- Laughing with others is chemical therapy

## Sunlight Exposure



- Aim for 15–30 minutes of daylight exposure
- Combine with your walk or sit near a window

## Small Accomplishments (Micro-Tasks)



- Break tasks into tiny parts: “I’ll organize just one drawer”
- Each check mark = a dopamine win

## Reward-Based Activities



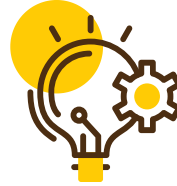
- Set up tiny rewards after completing a task
- Use apps like Habitica or make it fun: “If I do X, I get Y”

## Sleep & Restorative Downtime



- Prioritize sleep routines
- Brain chemicals reset and recharge while you sleep

## Novelty & Learning Something New



- Try a new recipe, new route, or mini skill online
- Your brain loves new

## Meditation & Visualization



- Deep breathing, guided imagery, or imagining your future goals
- 5–10 minutes per day can shift brain chemistry

## Listening to Music



- Create a playlist that makes you feel energized, calm, or nostalgic
- Music lights up your brain’s reward centers

## Physical Activity (Even Short Bursts)



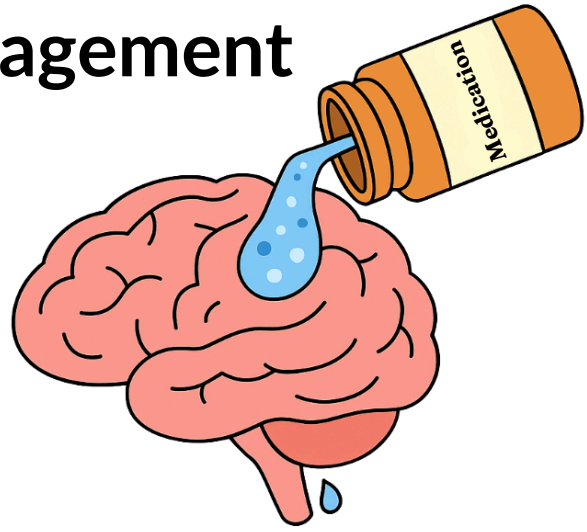
- 10–20 minutes of walking, stretching, biking, or dancing
- Even 5-minute movement breaks help



# Medication and Management

## Medication

As Parkinson's Disease progresses, the brain makes less dopamine, which makes movement and thinking harder. Medications like levodopa help **replace that missing dopamine**.



Something as simple as medication can help:

- Improve movement
- Reduce stiffness or tremors
- You feel more in control of your body
- Make daily tasks easier

## Tracking Symptoms

Your body and brain change over time, so it's important to notice:




- Are your symptoms getting worse?
  - Are your meds wearing off faster?
  - Do you feel more stiff or shaky between doses?
- ✓ Keep a symptom tracker or journal
- ✓ Share changes with your doctor right away

**The earlier medication is adjusted, the better it can help.**



## Activity as Medicine

In addition to medication, your brain needs movement and mental activity to stay strong. Think of this as your **“dopamine prescription”**:

-  Move more – walking, stretching, biking, dancing
-  Train your brain – puzzles, memory games, learning new things
-  Stay connected – conversation and laughter are good for your brain, too!

**These things boost natural dopamine and help you feel better between doses.**