

# Communication and Parkinson's

Many people with Parkinson's can experience problems with communication. The types and severity of the problems can vary from person to person, but all may lead to a feeling of social isolation, of becoming less involved in conversation and what's happening around you.

## Parkinson's can affect:

1. Non-verbal communication – problems can include:
  - facial expression can become reduced and in some cases almost mask like
  - body language can be affected by slowness or stiffness of movements, or tremor
2. Verbal communication – problems can include:
  - having a weak or fading voice and not being able to speak loudly
  - having a hoarse or shaky voice
  - speaking too quickly, or speaking with changing speeds – for example, speaking slowly then with a fast rush of speech
  - speech sounding monotonous, with no variation in pitch or loudness
  - difficulty coordinating breathing and speech
  - running out of breath in conversation

- difficulty starting to speak
- taking a long time to respond
- hesitating or stumbling over words
- slurred speech sounds
- problems finding the right word

## What can you do to help?

- **To maximise your communication, try some of the following:**
  1. Speak using a **loud** voice. You need to be louder than you think. Imagine you are projecting your voice to the back of the room.
  2. Try not to compete with background noise.
    - turn off the TV or radio
    - move away from the noise
    - in a group, ask people to speak one at a time
  3. Make sure you are facing the person you are speaking to.
    - make eye-contact
    - make sure you are in the same room, don't try to shout through to another room
  4. Think about what you are going to say before you start to speak.
  5. Try to use short sentences and stress key words.

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6. Talk slowly.
7. Try to remain calm and relaxed. It may help to take a deep breath before you start to speak.
8. If people don't understand what you have said, try repeating it in a different way
  - more loudly and more slowly
  - exaggerate your speech sounds
  - try rephrasing what you said
9. Remember that your facial expression may be giving a different message to the one you are saying. Try to consciously use facial expression.

- **Increase your awareness of your speech and non-verbal communication**
  - try out your **loud** voice and ask people what they think of it
  - think about tape recording some of your speech and listening back to it
  - watch yourself in a mirror as you speak
  - try out different expressions in front of a mirror – for example, happy, sad, surprised or angry

Speech and Language Therapist: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_

**Notes**

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