



SADA

THE SOUTH AFRICAN
DENTAL ASSOCIATION

*Patient Education
Information
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**Unite for
Parkinson's
Awareness**

What is Parkinson's Disease?

Parkinson's disease is a progressive nervous system disorder that affects movement. Symptoms generally develop slowly over years. The progression of symptoms is often a bit different from one person to another due to the diversity of the disease. The most common symptoms are:

- Tremors – usually in a limb, while at rest
- Slowed Movement (Bradykinesia)
- Rigid muscles
- Impaired posture and balance
- Loss of autonomic movements i.e., movements such as blinking, smiling and swallowing.

How does Parkinson's affect dental health?

- Physical issues such as rigidity, shaking, uncontrolled movements, and even balance problems can prevent a person with Parkinson's from maintaining good oral hygiene which can lead to gingivitis, periodontitis and teeth mobility.
- Parkinson's can alter face and tongue muscle function, affecting chewing and swallowing.
- Medications used to treat Parkinson's are usually associated with increased or decreased saliva, which may place the patient at a higher risk of developing cavities.

- Certain medications such as Levodopa taken for several years may lead to developing involuntary movements which can affect the jaw and cause cracked teeth and teeth grinding.
- Non-motor symptoms of Parkinson's, such as apathy, depression, and forgetfulness, may lead a person with PD to pay less attention to his or her daily dental health.

How should a patient with Parkinson's maintain their oral health?

- Use a toothbrush with a large-handled grip and a small head with soft bristles. An electric toothbrush is also a viable option.
- Aim to brush after every meal for two minutes, and also brush the tongue using the stronger side of the body. Obtain help from a care partner if necessary for flossing.
- Avoid mouthwashes due to the risk of choking but if still an option, use one that is non-alcohol based and does not contain chlorhexidine.
- If you have dentures, remove them after each meal, then brush and rinse them.

How may a Parkinson's patient improve dental visits?

- Schedule early morning visits, when waiting times tend to be shorter.
- Take prescribed medication such as Levodopa 60 to 90 minutes before the office visit.
- Inform your dentist about your condition and symptoms when making the appointment as well as all the medications you are on as certain medications may interact with anaesthetics.
- Ask to keep the dental chair more upright, to make swallowing easier.
- Plan several, shorter dentist visits, rather than fewer, longer ones.

Your oral healthcare practitioner is available to discuss your treatment and concerns. Patients and/or caregivers should utilize this resource to ensure optimal treatment is possible.