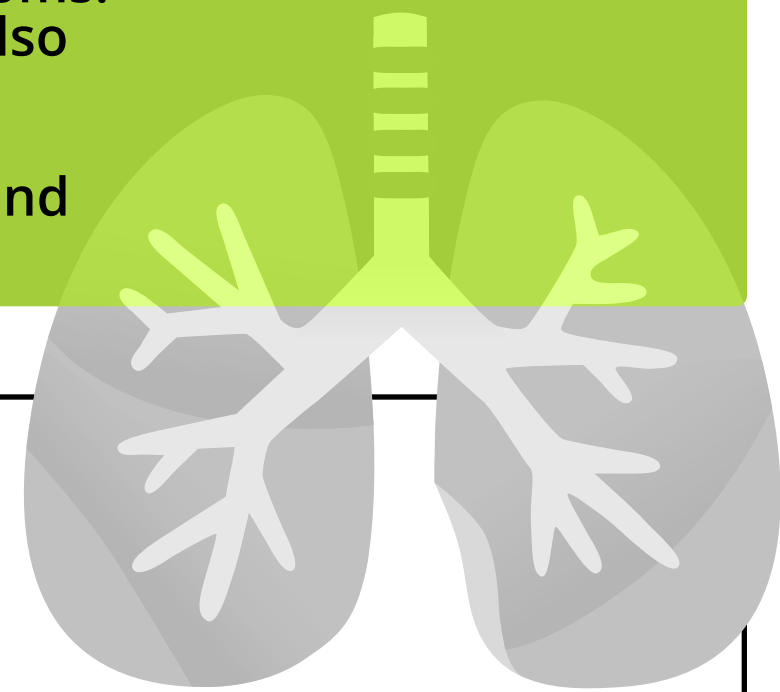


Parkinson's disease causes many motor and non-motor symptoms. One less commonly known symptom is breathing difficulties, also known as respiratory issues.

This guide explains common respiratory issues in Parkinson's and ways they may be treated or managed.

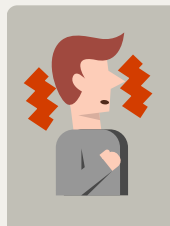


FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO RESPIRATORY ISSUES IN PARKINSON'S

- Medication effects
- Other health conditions such as asthma, allergies, heart disease, lung disease, or infection
- Movement changes
- Muscle stiffness
- Stooped posture
- Swallowing difficulties
- Anxiety

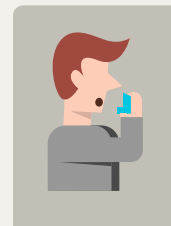
What are respiratory issues in Parkinson's and how are they treated?

Respiratory issues in PD can affect breathing, swallowing, coughing, chest movement, and sleep. Treatment depends on the cause and should be discussed with a healthcare provider.



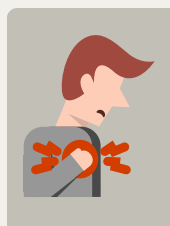
Respiratory dyskinesia. This is irregular, shallow, or rapid breathing caused by involuntary movements of the muscles involved in breathing. It may also be accompanied by dyskinesia (writhing movement) in other body parts.

Your doctor may adjust your medication if breathing changes are related to dyskinesia or medication timing.



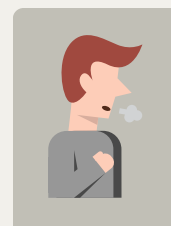
Aspiration pneumonia. This is a lung infection that can happen when food, liquid, saliva, or other substances enter the lungs. In Parkinson's, swallowing difficulties can increase the chance of food or liquid going down "the wrong pipe."

Antibiotics may be needed for infection. A speech-language pathologist can also assess swallowing and suggest safer swallowing strategies.



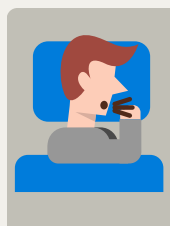
Restrictive lung disease. This occurs when a person's lungs cannot fully expand due to muscle stiffness that restricts and slows down chest movement. Symptoms may include chest tightness, especially while lying down, or shortness of breath while speaking.

Exercise, stretching, posture support, and physiotherapy may help improve chest movement.



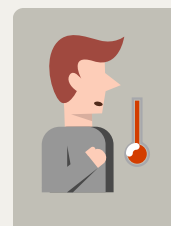
Shortness of breath (dyspnea). This is described as laboured breathing where taking in air feels difficult. It can be caused by medication "wearing off" or anxiety.

Treatment depends on the cause and may include medication review, anxiety treatment, exercise, or treatment for other conditions.



Obstructive sleep apnea. This condition causes breathing interruptions during sleep. Symptoms may include loud snoring, waking up gasping or choking, dry mouth, daytime sleepiness, poor concentration, and memory problems.

A sleep study can help diagnose sleep apnea. Treatment may include a breathing device, sleep-position changes, or other medical care.



Other health conditions. Non-Parkinson's conditions, such as asthma, allergies, lung disease, and heart disease, may also cause shortness of breath.

Work with your healthcare provider to identify and treat non-Parkinson's causes.

Respiratory issues in Parkinson's can lead to various functional changes that may impact your daily life. Some of these include increased difficulty with speaking and swallowing, reduced voice volume or projection, abnormal breathing patterns, weaker cough, difficulty clearing your throat, reduced ability to exercise or perform physical tasks, and fatigue or exhaustion due to increased effort in breathing.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO MANAGE RESPIRATORY ISSUES?

If you experience difficulties with breathing, a good first step is to inform your carepartner or healthcare provider. Here are some practical tips:

- **Pay attention** to when breathing changes happen, such as after meals, while lying down, during anxiety, or when medication is wearing off.
- **Tell your doctor** about any new or worsening breathing problems.
- Be consistent with medication to minimize motor difficulties that affect breathing.
- **Stay active and exercise** when you can, as movement can support breathing and chest movement.
- **Practice sitting or standing straighter**, as bending can make it harder to take deep breaths.
- **Ask for a referral** to a speech-language pathologist if you cough, choke, or notice swallowing problems.
- Speak with your doctor or therapist if anxiety is making breathing feel harder.
- **Ask about sleep concerns** if you snore loudly, wake up gasping, or feel very sleepy during the day.
- **Give up smoking**



Seek urgent care if you experience more severe shortness of breath, chest pain, blue lips, fever, confusion, or choking.



Where to find help

Support is available through these resources:

1. Call **9.1.1** for emergency such as severe shortness of breath, chest pain, blue lips, fever, confusion, or choking.
2. **Doctor or neurologist** for new or worsening breathing problems, medication timing, and non-PD causes.
3. **Speech-language pathologist** for swallowing, coughing during meals, choking, or food/liquid going down “the wrong pipe.”
4. **Physiotherapist or respiratory therapist** for posture, breathing exercises, cough strength, and safe physical activity.
5. **Sleep clinic** if you snore loudly, wake up gasping, or feel very sleepy during the day.
6. **Mental health professional** if anxiety makes breathing feel harder.

Your voice matters when you seek help

Appointments are often short, and respiratory issues may be one of many symptoms you experience in Parkinson's. To make the most of your visit, prepare by writing down when breathing changes happen, what they feel like, and what makes them better or worse. Prioritize urgent concerns, ask questions, and follow through on referrals, medication changes, or treatment recommendations.

Sources

- Axelerad et al. (2021) Respiratory Dysfunctions in Parkinson's Disease Patients, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8147845/>
- Parkinson Foundation
- Parkinson's UK
- MyParkinsonsTeam
- McMahon et al. (2023) A systematic review and meta-analysis of respiratory dysfunction in Parkinson's disease, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/ene.15743>

Taking care of your lungs

Taking care of your lungs can support breathing, coughing, speech, and physical activity.

In Parkinson's, stiffness, weaker muscles, and stooped posture can make it harder to breathe. Gentle exercises may help keep the chest muscles active and support breathing.

Speak with your doctor or physiotherapist about how much exercise is safe for you.

Flexibility exercises



- Stretch your chest
- Raise your arms overhead
- Pull your shoulders back
- Gently twist side to side

Breathing exercises



- Sit or lie comfortably
- Breathe in through your nose
- Feel your lower ribs expand
- Breathe out with relaxed shoulders
- Repeat 3 to 5 times

Aerobic exercises



- March in place for 2 minutes
- Hold on for balance
- March while seated, if needed
- Start slow, then increase pace
- Try lifting your knees higher