

Pain and Parkinson's: Are they related?

Medical conditions like arthritis or neuropathy often cause pain. Parkinson's symptoms may also be a direct cause or contributing factor. Always report pain to your doctor, as sometimes adjustment of PD medications can help. You may also benefit from a referral to physical or occupational therapy for specific exercises, environmental adjustments, positioning techniques and instruction in body mechanics. Complementary therapies such as massage therapy may also be helpful.

Muscle Pain and PD

- Cramping or abnormal posturing of a body part (commonly affecting the toes or foot) is called *dystonia*, a condition associated with PD. Dystonia often occurs in the middle of the night (when medication may be wearing off) or in the early morning hours (before medication begins to take effect). Report dystonia to your doctor for evaluation/recommendations.
- Muscles can feel stiff or “achy” with difficulty moving though your full range of motion. (One side of the body may be affected more than the other.) This may be due to *rigidity*, a primary symptom of PD.
- Pain may occur due to changes in posture, when muscles can become overstretched or shortened.

Self-Management for Pain

- If pain begins suddenly or an injury occurs, it is considered *acute*, especially if there is swelling or bruising. Apply cold packs for 15-20 minutes several times daily for the first 48-72 hours. Elevate the area to decrease swelling.
- If pain is long lasting (*chronic*), apply heat to the area for 15-20 minutes. Purchase a microwaveable hot pack that conforms to the area (or make your own with rice in a tube sock knotted at the opening). Heat pack according to directions; heat rice-filled sock for approximately 2 minutes in microwave.



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- If muscles feel tense or “knotted”, try self- massage. Apply pressure to the area with a tennis ball, using your body weight against it for deeper pressure. Knobby plastic massage tools or a Theracane can be purchased to get better leverage on hard-to-reach areas. Scheduling an appointment with a massage therapist may also be helpful.
 - Keep moving, changing positions frequently. Remember to take stretch breaks throughout the day.

Involving Your Team:

Seek the advice of a physical therapist, doctor or other health provider if:

- Pain lasts 2 weeks or longer
- Pain interferes with daily function or sleep
- Self-management techniques listed above are not effective
- Pain intensifies or worsens

