



Care Partner Guide for Daily Care

Educational Resources: Understanding Parkinson's Treatment Options

Parkinson's disease is treatable, though not yet curable. Treatment is individualized and evolves over time, often involving a combination of medications, therapies, lifestyle strategies, and—sometimes—advanced interventions. For care partners, understanding treatment options helps reduce uncertainty, support adherence, and participate meaningfully in shared decision-making.

This guide provides an overview of common Parkinson's treatment approaches and the caregiver's role in supporting them.

The Goals of Parkinson's Treatment

Treatment focuses on improving function and quality of life.

Common treatment goals include:

- Reducing motor symptoms such as stiffness and slowness
- Managing non-motor symptoms (mood, sleep, cognition, pain)
- Supporting independence and safety
- Minimizing medication side effects
- Preserving quality of life over time

Treatment decisions are rarely permanent. What works well today may need adjustment later. Care partners help monitor how treatments affect daily life—not just symptoms in the clinic.

Medications for Parkinson's

Medications are the foundation of Parkinson's treatment for most individuals.

Common medication categories include:

- Levodopa-based therapies
- Dopamine agonists
- MAO-B inhibitors
- COMT inhibitors
- Medications targeting specific non-motor symptoms

Medications help replace or mimic dopamine and improve movement. Their effectiveness depends heavily on **timing, consistency, and individual response**. Care partners often help manage schedules, track benefits and side effects, and communicate changes to providers.

Medication adjustments are common and expected as Parkinson's progresses.

Medication Timing & Symptom Fluctuations

Care partners may notice:

- "On" times with better movement
- "Off" times with stiffness or freezing
- Dyskinesias (wiggly movements) at peak medication effect
- Wearing-off before the next dose

These fluctuations help guide treatment adjustments. Keeping simple notes about timing and function can greatly assist the care team in optimizing therapy.

Rehabilitation Therapies: PT, OT & Speech Therapy

Rehabilitation therapies are essential components of Parkinson's care.

Physical Therapy (PT)

- Improves strength, balance, and mobility
- Reduces fall risk
- Supports walking and posture

Occupational Therapy (OT)

- Improves daily function and safety
- Recommends adaptive equipment
- Supports independence at home

Speech-Language Therapy (SLP)

- Addresses speech volume and clarity
- Supports swallowing safety
- Helps with communication strategies

Therapies are most effective when started early and revisited over time. Care partners help reinforce exercises and strategies at home and advocate for referrals when function changes.

Exercise as Treatment

Exercise is one of the most powerful tools in Parkinson's care.

Benefits of regular exercise include:

- Improved mobility and balance
- Better mood and sleep
- Slower functional decline
- Increased confidence and independence

Exercise is a form of treatment—not optional activity. Consistency matters more than intensity. Care partners often play a key role in encouraging safe, enjoyable movement routines.

Advanced Treatment Options

Some individuals may benefit from advanced therapies as symptoms become harder to manage.

Advanced options may include:

- Deep Brain Stimulation (DBS)
- Medication delivery systems (infusions or pumps)
- Specialized medication regimens

Advanced therapies are not “last resorts.” They are tools used when symptoms interfere with quality of life despite optimized medication. Care partners often help with evaluation preparation, post-procedure support, and ongoing adjustments.

Treating Non-Motor Symptoms

Non-motor symptoms require targeted treatment.

Commonly treated non-motor symptoms include:

- Anxiety or depression
- Sleep disorders
- Cognitive changes
- Hallucinations
- Pain, fatigue, or autonomic symptoms

Non-motor symptoms are medical symptoms and should be reported. Many are treatable and significantly improve daily comfort and function when addressed.

Complementary & Supportive Approaches

Some individuals explore supportive therapies alongside medical care.

May include:

- Nutrition counseling
- Mind-body practices (yoga, tai chi, mindfulness)
- Counseling or psychotherapy
- Support groups and education

These approaches support well-being and resilience. They should complement—not replace—medical treatment and be discussed with the care team.

The Care Partner's Role in Treatment Decisions

Care partners support treatment success in many ways.

Key caregiver roles include:

- Observing daily function and changes
- Supporting medication adherence
- Communicating concerns to providers
- Helping weigh risks and benefits
- Reinforcing therapy strategies at home

Care partners help ensure treatment decisions reflect real-life priorities, not just clinical measures.

When to Revisit Treatment Plans

Contact the healthcare team if you notice:

- New or worsening symptoms
- Increased falls or confusion
- Medication side effects
- Reduced quality of life
- Increased caregiver strain

Treatment plans are dynamic. Reassessment is expected and appropriate.

Tools That Support Treatment Success

Helpful tools include:

- Medication schedules or reminder systems
- Symptom and side-effect logs
- Therapy exercise handouts
- Appointment preparation notes

- Shared care plans

Organization reduces stress and improves outcomes. Simple tools make complex care more manageable.

A Final Thought for Care Partners

Parkinson's treatment is not a single decision—it is an ongoing process shaped by changing needs, goals, and experiences. Your observations, advocacy, and support play a vital role in making treatment effective and meaningful.

You are an essential part of the care team.

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