



Visual Changes in Parkinson's Disease

Understanding Vision Symptoms and Practical Ways to Protect Safety and Confidence

Vision changes are common in Parkinson's disease and can affect safety, reading, driving, balance, and confidence. These changes are often subtle at first and may fluctuate throughout the day—especially with fatigue, lighting, or medication timing.

Visual symptoms in Parkinson's are **neurological**, not simply “eye problems,” and they deserve recognition and care.

Through the **Wisconsin Parkinson Association**, individuals with Parkinson's are encouraged to recognize visual changes early and use practical strategies to stay safe and engaged in daily life.

Visual changes in Parkinson's are real symptoms—not imagination or aging alone.

Why Parkinson's Affects Vision

Parkinson's affects brain pathways involved in:

- Visual processing
- Eye movement control
- Contrast and depth perception
- Attention and visual scanning

Dopamine plays a role in how the brain interprets visual information. Changes in dopamine—as well as fatigue, sleep disruption, and medications—can all influence vision.

Common Visual Symptoms in Parkinson's

Blurred or Fluctuating Vision

- Vision that worsens during medication “off” periods

- Difficulty focusing, especially when tired
 - Intermittent clarity rather than constant blur
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Reduced Contrast Sensitivity

- Difficulty seeing objects that blend into the background
- Trouble with low-light or dim environments
- Increased fall risk on stairs, curbs, or uneven surfaces

Contrast sensitivity changes are common and often under-recognized.

Double Vision (Diplopia)

- Seeing two images, especially when tired
 - Often related to eye movement coordination
 - May improve with rest or visual therapy
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Eye Movement & Tracking Difficulties

- Trouble scanning lines of text
- Losing place while reading
- Difficulty shifting gaze quickly

These symptoms may affect reading, driving, or navigating busy environments.

Dry Eyes & Reduced Blinking

- Burning or gritty sensation
- Watery eyes
- Increased light sensitivity

Reduced blink rate is common in Parkinson's and contributes to eye discomfort.

Visual Hallucinations & Illusions

Some individuals experience:

- Seeing people, animals, or shapes that are not present
- Misinterpreting shadows or patterns
- Visual changes that are brief and non-threatening

Hallucinations in Parkinson's are a **medical symptom**, often related to disease progression, medications, memory changes or fatigue—not a psychiatric illness.

How Visual Changes Are Evaluated

Evaluation may include:

- Neurological assessment
- Review of Parkinson's medications
- Comprehensive eye exam
- Discussion of hallucinations or perceptual changes

Seeing both a neurologist and an eye care professional can be helpful.

Practical Strategies to Manage Visual Changes

Improve Lighting & Contrast

- Use bright, even lighting
 - Add contrast strips to stairs or thresholds
 - Choose high-contrast colors for household items
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Support Reading & Screen Use

- Use larger font sizes
- Increase contrast on screens
- Take visual breaks to reduce fatigue

Address Dry Eyes

- Use artificial tears as recommended
- Blink intentionally
- Limit prolonged screen use

Reduce Fall Risk

- Clear clutter from walkways
- Use contrasting colors for floors and steps
- Avoid rushing, especially in dim environments

Protecting vision helps protect balance and confidence.

Medication & Vision

Some visual symptoms fluctuate with medication timing. Others may be medication side effects.

Helpful steps include:

- Tracking when visual symptoms occur
- Noting relation to “on/off” periods
- Reporting new hallucinations promptly

Medication adjustments often improve symptoms.

Driving & Visual Safety

Visual changes may affect:

- Night driving
- Depth perception
- Reaction time

If concerns arise, discussing driving safety openly allows proactive planning—not sudden loss of independence.

When to Contact Your Care Team

Reach out if you notice:

- Sudden vision changes
- Frequent double vision
- New or worsening hallucinations
- Vision issues affecting walking or safety
- Eye pain or rapid vision loss

Visual symptoms are treatable and should not be ignored.

Living Well with Visual Changes

Many people with Parkinson's successfully adapt to vision changes using awareness, environmental adjustments, and medical support.

Seeing differently does not mean seeing less of life.

Understanding and adapting restores confidence.

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