WISCONSIN PARKINSON ASSOCIATION

**The First Year After a Parkinson's Diagnosis**

**What Many People Experience and How to Navigate the Early Stages**

Receiving a Parkinson's diagnosis can feel like a turning point. The first year often brings many questions, adjustments, and emotions as you begin to understand what this diagnosis means for your health and daily life.

While everyone's experience is different, many people find that the first year becomes a time of learning, building support, and discovering practical strategies that help them move forward with confidence.

It is important to remember that Parkinson's progresses differently for each person.

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**Taking Time to Process the Diagnosis**

The early weeks and months after diagnosis are often filled with mixed emotions. Some people feel overwhelmed or uncertain, while others feel relief after finally having an explanation for symptoms they have been experiencing.

There is no right timeline for processing this information. Some individuals want to learn everything they can right away, while others prefer to take things one step at a time. Both approaches are normal and healthy.

Giving yourself time to adjust can make the process feel more manageable.

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**Learning About Parkinson's**

Understanding the basics of Parkinson's disease can help reduce uncertainty and empower you to participate actively in your care.

Parkinson's affects the brain's ability to regulate movement and can also affect non-motor functions such as sleep, mood, digestion, and energy levels. Symptoms often develop gradually and may change over time.

Learning from trusted sources, educational programs, and healthcare professionals can help you build knowledge without becoming overwhelmed.

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**Building Your Care Team**

Parkinson's care is often supported by a team of healthcare professionals who address different aspects of the condition.

Your care team may include:

- Neurologist or movement disorder specialist
- Primary care provider
- Physical therapist
- Occupational therapist
- Speech-language pathologist
- Mental health professional
- Pharmacist

Not everyone will need all of these specialists right away. Your healthcare team can help guide decisions about which services may be helpful at different stages.

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**Understanding Medications**

Medication is one of the primary tools used to manage Parkinson's symptoms. In the first year after diagnosis, your neurologist may discuss whether medication is appropriate and what symptoms it is intended to address.

Medication plans are individualized and may change over time as symptoms evolve.

If medications are prescribed, taking them consistently and on schedule is important. Keeping notes about how symptoms respond to medication can help guide treatment decisions during follow-up visits.

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**Staying Active and Moving**

Exercise is widely recognized as one of the most beneficial lifestyle strategies for individuals living with Parkinson's.

Regular movement supports strength, balance, flexibility, and overall health. Many people also find that exercise improves mood, sleep, and energy levels.

Activities that may be helpful include:

- Walking
- Cycling
- Parkinson's exercise classes
- Dance or boxing programs designed for Parkinson's
- Strength and balance training
- Physical therapy

Finding an activity you enjoy can help make exercise part of your routine.

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**Noticing Symptoms and Changes**

Parkinson's symptoms can vary from day to day and from person to person. During the first year, many individuals begin to notice patterns in how symptoms respond to sleep, stress, activity, and medication timing.

Keeping simple notes about symptoms can help you and your healthcare provider understand what strategies are working well and where adjustments may be needed.

You may want to track:

- Changes in movement or balance
- Energy levels and fatigue
- Sleep patterns
- Mood or cognitive changes
- Medication timing and effects

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**Connecting With Others**

Many people find that connecting with others who understand Parkinson's can make a meaningful difference during the first year after diagnosis.

Support groups and educational programs provide opportunities to share experiences, learn practical tips, and ask questions in a supportive environment.

Community programs can also help individuals and families feel less alone while navigating the early stages of Parkinson's.

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**Taking Care of Emotional Health**

Adjusting to a chronic condition can affect emotional well-being. Feelings of stress, anxiety, frustration, or sadness are common, especially in the early months after diagnosis.

Talking with trusted family members, friends, or a counselor can help individuals process these feelings. Support groups and educational communities may also provide reassurance and encouragement.

Emotional health is an important part of overall well-being.

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**Looking Ahead**

While the first year after diagnosis can bring many changes, it can also be a time of learning, resilience, and building new routines that support living well.

Many individuals discover that with education, support, and practical strategies, Parkinson's becomes something they manage rather than something that defines them.

You do not have to navigate this journey alone.

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**Wisconsin Parkinson Association Resources**

The Wisconsin Parkinson Association offers programs and resources that support individuals and families at every stage of Parkinson's.

Resources include:

- Support groups throughout Wisconsin
- Educational programs and community events
- **Parkinson's EmPower Talks: Insights from the Experts**
- **Pearls for Parkinson's: Tips for Everyday Living**
- Wellness and movement programs

To explore programs and resources, visit **wiparkinson.org**.