



Understanding Parkinson's Disease

What Professional Caregivers Should Report to the Neurologist

A Guide for Professional Caregivers Supporting Individuals Living With Parkinson's

Professional caregivers play an important role in observing changes in individuals living with Parkinson's disease. Because Parkinson's symptoms can fluctuate throughout the day, neurologists often rely on observations from caregivers who assist with daily activities.

Clear communication about changes in symptoms helps the healthcare team determine whether medications, therapies, or other care strategies need adjustment.

When possible, caregivers should **document patterns, timing of symptoms, and any recent changes** to help inform the neurologist's evaluation.

Changes in Movement and Mobility

Professional caregivers should report any noticeable changes in mobility or motor symptoms, including:

- Increased tremor
- Increased stiffness or rigidity
- Slower walking or difficulty initiating movement
- Shuffling gait or smaller steps
- Increased freezing episodes
- Difficulty turning or changing direction
- Difficulty standing from a chair or transferring
- Increased falls or near-falls

Changes in movement may indicate medication timing issues, disease progression, or the need for therapy services.

Changes in Medication Response

Parkinson's medications are carefully timed and may require adjustment over time.

Professional caregivers should report observations such as:

- Medications appearing to wear off sooner than expected
- Increased stiffness or slowed movement before the next dose
- Periods when mobility suddenly worsens ("OFF periods")
- Periods of uncontrolled or excessive movements (dyskinesia)
- Increased confusion or behavioral changes after medication doses

If symptoms fluctuate throughout the day, note the **time of day symptoms occur and the timing of medications**.

Swallowing and Eating Changes

Parkinson's can affect the muscles involved in swallowing.

Professional caregivers should report:

- Coughing or choking during meals
- Difficulty swallowing medications
- Food remaining in the mouth after swallowing
- Frequent throat clearing during meals
- Increased drooling or difficulty managing saliva
- Unexplained weight loss
- Recurrent respiratory infections

These symptoms may indicate dysphagia and may require evaluation by a speech-language pathologist.

Changes in Thinking, Behavior, or Perception

Professional caregivers should report cognitive or behavioral changes, including:

- Increased confusion
- Memory problems
- Difficulty following instructions
- Hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that are not present)
- Delusions or suspicious thinking
- Increased agitation or anxiety

These symptoms may be related to medication effects, infection, dehydration, or Parkinson's-related cognitive changes.

Sleep Changes

Sleep disturbances are common in Parkinson's and may affect daytime functioning.

Professional caregivers should report:

- Difficulty sleeping at night
- Frequent nighttime awakenings
- Acting out dreams during sleep
- Increased daytime sleepiness
- Sudden episodes of falling asleep

Sleep changes may require further medical evaluation.

Autonomic Symptoms

Parkinson's can affect the autonomic nervous system, which controls automatic body functions.

Professional caregivers should report:

- Dizziness when standing
- Episodes of low blood pressure
- Fainting or near-fainting
- Constipation
- Urinary urgency or incontinence
- Temperature regulation problems
- Excessive sweating

Monitoring these symptoms can help guide treatment decisions.

Changes in Daily Function

Professional caregivers should report if the individual is having increased difficulty with activities of daily living such as:

- Dressing or grooming
- Eating independently
- Using utensils or writing
- Walking longer distances
- Maintaining balance during routine activities

Changes in daily function may indicate the need for therapy or care plan adjustments.

The Importance of Documentation

Professional caregivers can assist the healthcare team by documenting:

- The **timing of symptoms**
- **Medication administration times**
- **Patterns of symptom changes**
- **Recent falls or safety concerns**
- **New or worsening symptoms**

Clear documentation helps neurologists make informed decisions about treatment.

Supporting Effective Parkinson's Care

Professional caregivers are often the first to recognize changes in symptoms or daily function.

Reporting observations promptly helps the healthcare team adjust care plans, medications, and therapies to better support the individual living with Parkinson's.

Wisconsin Parkinson Association

The **Wisconsin Parkinson Association (WPA)** provides education, resources, and training materials for professional caregivers and healthcare professionals supporting individuals living with Parkinson's.

To learn more about Parkinson's care resources and education, visit:

wiparkinson.org