



Why Parkinson's Medications Must Be Given On Time

A Quick Training Guide for Assisted Living and Long-Term Care Staff

Parkinson's disease medications are **time-sensitive** and must be administered according to the specific schedule prescribed for the individual. Unlike many other medications, Parkinson's medications are designed to maintain a consistent level of medication in the brain to support movement and daily functioning.

Even small delays can lead to a noticeable worsening of symptoms.

For many individuals living with Parkinson's, medications should be given **within a 15-minute window of the scheduled time** whenever possible.

Why Timing Matters

Parkinson's medications help replace or mimic dopamine, a chemical in the brain that supports smooth and coordinated movement.

When medication levels drop too low because a dose is delayed or missed, the brain temporarily loses the support it needs to regulate movement and other functions.

This can cause a rapid return of Parkinson's symptoms, often referred to as an **"OFF period."**

What Can Happen When Medication Is Late

Delayed doses may lead to sudden and sometimes severe worsening of symptoms.

Possible complications include:

Increased rigidity and immobility

Residents may become very stiff and unable to move or reposition themselves.

Falls

Loss of mobility and balance increases fall risk.

Swallowing difficulty

Muscles involved in swallowing may become weaker or less coordinated, increasing aspiration risk.

Hallucinations and confusion

Sudden changes in medication levels can worsen cognitive symptoms.

Some residents may appear frozen, unable to stand, or unable to communicate effectively until medication takes effect again.

Why Standard Medication Windows May Not Work

Many facilities use standard medication administration windows (for example, one hour before or after scheduled time).

For Parkinson's medications, these broader windows can cause significant symptom fluctuations.

Parkinson's medications are often scheduled at very specific times throughout the day to maintain stable symptom control.

Best Practices for Parkinson's Medication Administration

Facilities can improve safety by adopting several simple practices.

- **Treat Parkinson's medications as time-critical medications**
- **Follow the exact schedule ordered by the provider**
- **Avoid batching Parkinson's medications with routine medication passes**
- **Communicate with nursing staff if a medication delay occurs**
- **Observe the resident for worsening symptoms if a dose is missed**

When possible, medication timing should align with the resident's established home schedule.

What to Do If You Notice Motor Fluctuations

Sometimes staff may notice that a resident's symptoms change depending on medication timing, even if the medication schedule is written as a general time range.

Signs that medication timing may need adjustment include:

- Increased stiffness before the next dose
- Difficulty walking or standing at certain times of day
- Freezing episodes
- Increased tremor or slowed movement before medication
- Noticeable improvement shortly after medication is given

These changes may indicate motor fluctuations, meaning symptoms worsen as medication levels wear off.

What Staff Should Do

If these patterns are observed:

- Document the timing of symptoms and medication administration
- Share observations with the nursing team
- Contact the resident's provider
- Explain the pattern you are seeing and your concerns
- Ask if the provider would like to **order specific medication times rather than general administration windows**

Clear medication timing orders can help reduce symptom fluctuations and improve daily functioning.

Staff observations are extremely valuable in helping providers adjust treatment plans.

When to Alert Nursing Staff or a Provider

Notify nursing staff if a resident experiences:

- Sudden inability to move
- Increased stiffness or freezing
- Difficulty swallowing
- New confusion or hallucinations
- Repeated falls

These symptoms may indicate that medication timing needs adjustment.

Supporting Residents Living with Parkinson's

Timely medication administration is one of the most important ways facility staff can support residents living with Parkinson's disease.

Consistent medication timing helps residents maintain:

- Mobility and independence
 - Safer swallowing
 - Clearer thinking
 - Reduced fall risk
 - Improved quality of life
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Wisconsin Parkinson Association

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

For additional Parkinson's care resources and educational materials, visit:

wiparkinson.org

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