

# Anxiety and Parkinson's

## What is anxiety?

- Anxiety can be an entirely normal feeling and is often an appropriate response to a dangerous or threatening situation; what we refer to as the 'fight or flight' instinct.
- We all experience anxiety from time to time along a spectrum that includes feeling stressed, worried, tense, uncertain, afraid, or even terrified.
- Sometimes anxiety can be positive when it spurs us into action and helps us meet deadlines or do adequate preparation
- Anxiety becomes an anxiety disorder when it interferes with daily functioning (types of disorder include panic disorder a feature of which includes panic attacks)

## What are the symptoms of anxiety?

- Physical: include sweating, pounding of the heart, shortness of breath, tightness in the chest, light-headedness or dizziness, dry mouth, nausea or an upset stomach.
- Psychological symptoms; include excessive worries, ruminating thoughts, or a sense of feeling 'spaced out', detached, not yourself.
- Anxiety may lead to poor concentration, irritability, over-reacting to situations, sleep disruption, fatigue, muscle pain and tension.
- Sometimes people become caught up in a panic cycle where oversensitivity to and worry about the physical sensations and what will happen next, triggers more symptoms that in turn increase anxiety and so on in a vicious cycle.

## Anxiety – relationship with PD

- Evidence shows increased incidence of anxiety in people with Parkinson's compared with general population

- Anxiety often not limited to person dx'd with PD and may also affect partners/carers
- Anxiety can sometimes go hand in hand with depression
- Often anxiety in people with PD is reactive and focussed on fears about the future. This can range from worry about the progress of the disease, changes in symptoms, roles, relationships, finance, employment and so on
- Or can have a chemical/biological component.
- Parkinson's affects the autonomic nervous system which can give rise to feelings of anxiety
- Anxiety can be related to changes in brain chemicals such as noradrenaline and serotonin
- Anxiety often happens when medications are wearing off
- Anxiety symptoms may relate to side effects of medications
- If you are experiencing anxiety it is therefore important to monitor patterns and tell your doctor so he or she can discuss whether any adjustments to your medication regime may help.

## Anxiety – Impact on life

- Anxiety exacerbates PD symptoms eg tremor worsens, muscle tension more painful
- Social anxiety -the individual worries that he or she will act in a way that will be humiliating or embarrassing and finds it easier to avoid social situations
- Social withdrawal (friends and partner)
- Social isolation
  - → depression
- Unhelpful thoughts; when anxious people are more inclined to interpret circumstances that support their anxiety making them even more anxious
- Relationship strain

## Anxiety – Treatments

- Medication review
- Anxiety-relieving medication if appropriate
- Cognitive-behavioural therapy
- Relaxation strategies
- Gaining a sense of control over anxiety can be achieved through self awareness, feeling an episode coming on , understanding how anxiety works and developing confidence in managing the anxiety by shortcircuiting anxiety maintaining thoughts and using deep breathing and other relaxation techniques to combat the sensations and positive reassurance that the feelings will pass.
- Relaxation can be hard work! Watching TV is not relaxation. Experimenting with relaxation tapes, yoga, massage and meditation will help you develop a combination of strategies that will increase your confidence about managing your anxiety
- Actively learning and regularly practising relaxation is the key
- Counselling can also help people challenge unproductive or unhelpful thought patterns that may be fuelling the person's fears.

## Anxiety – Helping Yourself

- Recognise symptoms of anxiety.
- Make an effort and Relax !
- Avoiding stimulants such as caffeinated drinks, tea/coffee, alcohol and cigarettes may be helpful
- Reorganise and re-prioritise
- Communicate!
- Don't allow PD to be central issue in your life
- Confront "feared" situations gradually
- Check if your thinking might be biased negatively.

- Seek professional help.

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Anxiety presentation