

Seven Common Parkinson's Misconceptions

The general public makes seven common misconceptions with relation to Parkinson's disease. Dispelling these myths will go a long way to creating awareness about this incurable neurological disorder and allow those afflicted with it to feel more comfortable in society.

The first

common misconception is that Parkinson's disease only affects the elderly. This is absolutely false. Although this disease does tend more often to strike those in late middle age, that is in their fifties or early sixties, it does also occur in younger people. In recent years, an average of 5-10 percent of newly diagnosed cases of Parkinson's disease were early-onset, that is they were been found in people under the age of 40. Younger patients don't tend to suffer from walking or balance-related issues or have their thinking processes impaired as often as older patients but they do often experience vibrations and involuntary movements.

The

second misconception is that all people with Parkinson's disease suffer from tremors. Tremors are the most common symptom of Parkinson's disease. Tremors are found in approximately 70 percent of sufferers, however 15-25 percent of Parkinson's patients do not experience any form of tremors at all.

Public perception often unfairly stereotypes Parkinson's

patients as being miserable, rude or stupid. As the disease progresses, sufferers develop more and more difficulties in their ability to communicate with others. Problems with speech, swallowing, drooling, and jerky facial and body movements result in people labeling a Parkinson's patient unfairly. Some people, unaware of a person's condition, wrongly believe that person to be inebriated when their speech is slurred.

The

fourth common misconception is that there is a way to prevent Parkinson's disease. Researchers have not identified the exact cause of the disease and therefore absent this information, prevention is impossible. Most, however, do believe that Parkinson's disease is caused by a combination of environmental factors coupled with a genetic predisposition.

The

fifth misconception is that lifestyle modifications have no impact in improving disease symptoms. In fact, the reverse is true. Regular exercise, particularly muscle-strengthening exercises and walking, and accompanying dietary changes cannot slow the progression of the disease but can decrease the severity of symptoms.

The sixth common

misconception is that people with Parkinson's disease are unable to live independent and productive lives. This is patently untrue. The progression of the disease differs greatly between individuals. Some individuals suffer milder forms of Parkinson's than do others. Not everyone experiences the same combination of symptoms or equal severity of symptoms. With medication, regular exercise and dietary considerations most Parkinson's sufferers can live independently and be as productive as anyone else. Initially many do not need to quit their jobs, although some may as their disease progresses and their condition deteriorates.

The

seventh common misconception is that Parkinson's disease causes death.

Parkinson's has not been proven fatal although patients suffering from it do have particular health concerns. The disease may wreak havoc on the respiratory system, which has a tendency to lead to pneumonia, under certain conditions. A form of pneumonia known as aspiration pneumonia is of particular concern. Many sufferers develop problems with swallowing which can cause aspiration of food and lead to aspiration pneumonia. Additionally, a lack of movement can cause a person to be more susceptible to developing a variety of infections. Many Parkinson's patients don't develop any of the above problems and continue live with the disease anywhere from 20-30 years after diagnosis.