

COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS IN PARKINSON'S DISEASE

Nearly all people with Parkinson's (PD) will experience problems with communication, which can include speech, voice, and cognitive abilities. The most common communication disorder is *hypokinetic dysarthria*, a speech and voice disorder that causes rigidity and slowness of the systems of communication, including breathing, voice, and speech.

Problems with communication can result in social isolation and difficulty communicating your needs to your healthcare providers and carepartners. Listeners may have increased difficulty hearing you, and may be asking you to speak up repeatedly.

Sound familiar?

- My spouse needs a hearing aid.
- I'm often misheard when ordering at restaurants.
- I don't answer the phone anymore.
- I used to go for coffee, but I stopped because my friends can't hear me.
- I speak but nobody responds. It's like I am not even there.

Treatment

Evaluation and treatment of hypokinetic dysarthria is performed by a Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP). You may also need to meet with an Ear, Nose, and Throat Specialist. In British Columbia, local hospitals, rehabilitation centres, and movement disorder clinics employ SLPs to provide both inpatient and outpatient services. In addition, many SLPs have private practices.

The Lee Silverman Voice Treatment® (LSVT® LOUD) is an evidence-based treatment for hypokinetic dysarthria. It is an intensive and unique speech therapy specifically designed for the communication problems experienced by people with PD.

Self-Help

To strengthen your voice, speech, and communication abilities, try the following strategies:

- Get your listener's attention before speaking.
- Maintain eye contact with your listener.
- Avoid speaking in the presence of distracting background noise.
- You may need to speak slower. Make sure every word is clear.
- Swallow before speaking to clear any pooled saliva.
- Try to speak louder than you are used to speaking.
- Begin speaking with a topic phrase, such as "I would like to talk about..."
- Try to plan important conversations during a time when you are feeling your best (medication "on" time).

Additional Resources

Speech Language Pathologist Directories

Speech and Hearing BC | speechandhearingbc.ca/public/find-a-professional

College of Speech & Hearing Health Professionals of BC | www.cshhpbcc.org/docs/directorybycity.pdf

Lee Silverman Voice Treatment® Global | www.lsvtglobal.com/LSVTFindClinicians

Communication and Swallow Booklet | Parkinson Society BC | bit.ly/communicationswallow

Swallowing Difficulties Helpsheet | Parkinson Society BC | bit.ly/pdswallowingdifficulty

–

This helpsheet was prepared in collaboration with Sherri Zelazny, Registered Speech Language Pathologist, and Director, Parkinson Society British Columbia Board of Directors.