



The Parkinsonian

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Northwest PADRECC

Parkinson's Disease Research, Education & Clinical Center

Driving Safety in Parkinson's Disease

Ergun Y. Uc, MD

In addition to tremors, slowness, stiffness, and walking problems, Parkinson's disease (PD) can also impair vision, cognition, and cause depression and daytime sleepiness. The main features of cognitive impairment in PD include difficulties with attention, memory, planning and decision-making, and difficulties shifting between different activities. Problems with vision may include sensitivity to light or darkness, blurred vision, and a difficulty sensing moving objects.

Driving is an important part of many people's lives. Some people feel that continuing driving protects their mobility and independence. Other drivers may feel that stopping driving will lead to feelings of social isolation, lowered quality of life, and depression.

Driving safety depends on good vision, focused attention, and coordinated motor function. Because of the impairments listed above, drivers with PD may be at higher risk for unsafe driving and crashes. Driving simulator studies have shown that drivers with PD have a higher risk for crashes compared to drivers without PD. These drivers also commit more safety errors and are more likely to be labeled as "unsafe" on road tests. In addition, drivers with PD have a decreased ability to respond to additional challenges during driving. These challenges may include driving under low visibility conditions such as fog or dusk, approaching a dangerous intersection, and driving on unfamiliar roads - especially if the driver is searching for landmarks or is trying to find their way. Distractions similar to talking on a cellular phone or talking to a passenger can deteriorate their driving ability further.

However, these cognitive, visual, and motor impairments do not affect all PD patients in the same manner. Therefore,

just a diagnosis of PD is not enough to make a decision on driving fitness. This decision should be a joint process including the neurologist, the neuropsychologist, the occupational therapist, the patient, and the family. An opinion from an ophthalmologist or a driving expert can be obtained, if needed. The patient may be asked to take the state road test. If a driver with PD has good insight into their cognitive, visual, motor, and driving impairments, they usually minimize risk by restricting their driving to familiar roads, good weather, and light traffic conditions, and avoiding distractions such as cellular phone use during driving.

Research on driving rehabilitation for impaired drivers is in progress. Although there are no scientifically proven driving rehabilitation methods available for drivers with PD yet, the following recommendations can be made:

1. Stay active
2. Ask your healthcare provider the side effects of certain medications that may influence your ability to drive safely
3. Use common sense to avoid potentially risky driving situations
4. Discuss with your healthcare provider to find out if a consult with a neuropsychologist or occupational therapist at the Portland VA Medical Center is appropriate. An occupational therapist with expertise on driving can give you on and off-road tests to see how PD is affecting your driving and can make individualized recommendations.

Ergun Uc, MD is the principal investigator of federally funded studies on driving safety and rehabilitation in PD and is the published author on driving issues in PD. Dr. Uc has found that individuals with PD generally have more safety errors than drivers without the disease, and these errors are associated with impairments in cognition, vision, and motor function. These errors increase when drivers engage in distractions or during times of low visibility.

Please see page 2 for a list of additional resources.



Driving Safety (continued from page 1)

Driver and Motor Vehicle Services Safety Unit
(503) 945-5001 or www.oregondmv.com

Area Agencies on Aging

For information on alternative methods of transportation in your area. (800) 282-8096 or www.eldercare.gov

The American Public Transportation Association (APTA)

Provides an online listing of state and local providers of public transportation and related organizations. www.apta.com

Federal Highway Administration

<http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov>

The Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists (ADED) (866) 672-9466 or www.aded.net

AARP Driving Safety Program (888) 227-7669 or www.aarp.org

Easter Seals

Transportation solutions for caregivers: (866) 528-6278 or <http://seniortransportation.easterseals.com>

Dear Ms. O'Connor:

After reading the latest *Parkinsonian*, I drew my wife's attention to the "Want to Contribute?" box. She went right to her computer and in a couple of hours, wrote the enclosed poem which covers most of my current P.D. complaints. Having had Parkinson's for 17 years or so, I thought it might strike a chord with others who share my problems, so with our best wishes, am sending it on to you.

Sincerely,
Melvin L. Thornton

PD LAMENT

I'm not the man I used to be
(Perhaps I never was)
But the shape I lived in formerly
Has disappeared without a buzz.
As a botanist, I never thought
I'd be defeated by a leaf;
Now every lettuce ever bought
Makes swallowing a battle brief.
My writing never used to drift,
(I penned a handsome letter)
But my current micrographic script?
A kid in first grade could do better.
Composing was an easy leap
And tho' it could be worse
The word now sought is buried deep;
It's gone when I converse.
My stamina is quite deplete
(I try but quickly wilt)
My grip a robin could defeat
Frustration fills me to the hilt.
And if I grasp a fork too tight
(To list one more dilemma)
Another problem comes to light
The bother of the P.D. tremor.

When I was just a youthful pup,
My head would reach the valance
But if, today, I straighten up
I would quite quickly-over balance.
Of course I manage still to drive
But parking is a chore
And tho' to parallel I strive
The car ends slantways even more.
You'll wonder if I think it cool
To copy Pavarotti
But since I often seem to drool
Sheet-size hankies aren't so dotty.
My other functions sometimes fail
(I won't be more specific)
And making love like a healthy male
Alas, would surely be terrific.
No matter how much sleep I get.
My body yearns for more.
So books and papers and TV
Unread, unseen, as I gently snore!
If things could so much better be,
They also could be worse;
I hear, I think, I walk, I see,
And I value every verse
Conceived, composed, like much of life,
Entirely by my loving wife!

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January 6, 2010

Want to Contribute?

This newsletter is yours, and we think you should be involved. If you have any art, poems, stories, or articles you would like to share with other Parkinson's patients, please send them to the address listed at right or e-mail them to nwpadrecc@va.gov with "Newsletter submission" as the subject line.

Portland VA Medical Center
Attention: Susan O'Connor
P3-PADRECC
3710 SW US Veterans Hospital Rd.
Portland, OR 97239

The Washington State Parkinson's Disease Registry (VA IRB # 31675)

If you have a diagnosis of Parkinson's Disease or atypical parkinsonism, you are eligible to participate in the Washington state Parkinson's Disease Registry which is co-directed by Cyrus Zabetian, M.D., M.S. and James Leverenz, M.D. This is a research registry which notifies participants about clinical studies in which they may be eligible to participate. Enrollment occurs by phone and consists of 15 screening questions and an interview about diagnosis, symptoms, medications and family history. This usually takes less than 30 minutes. For information on how to participate, call toll free (888) 365-9901 or visit our website at www.registerparkinsons.org, where you can start the screening process online.

Recruiting VA Studies

Memory and Movement Disorders Demonstration Project (VA IRB ID: 1585 VA IRB Grant Number: #02-2202)

Joseph Quinn, M.D., is conducting this research study in order to track the frequency and types of changes in mental functioning that occur over time in Parkinson's patients. Participants would be asked to attend one or more study visits. All study visits would take place at the Portland VA Medical Center. The first visit would take less than twenty minutes. If asked to continue in the study there would be a second 90-minute visit and then follow-up examinations once a year for the next 3 years. All patients in the Parkinson's Disease Research, Education and Clinic Center (PADRECC) are invited to participate in this study. You may or may not personally benefit from participating in this study. However, by serving as a subject, you may help us learn how to benefit patients in the future. For more information on how to participate, please contact Susan O'Connor, RN, at (503) 721-1091.

Parkinson Associate Risk Study (PARS): Evaluating Potential Screening Tools for Parkinson Disease (VA IRB ID: 2021; VA IRB Grant Number: # 05-0307)

Kathryn Chung, M.D., is conducting this research study to estimate the frequency of olfactory loss in first-degree relatives of Parkinson's patients. Participation by a first-degree relative of a Parkinson's patient would require six one-hour annual visits to the Portland VA Medical Center and completion of six annual smell tests by mail. The sub-study would require travel to Connecticut for a brain imaging procedure. All costs for travel to Connecticut will be paid by the study sponsor. All first-degree relatives of Parkinson's Disease (PD) patients above the age of 50 or within ten years of the age of diagnosis of PD are invited to participate. This is a research study and not treatment or diagnosis of PD. You may not benefit from participating in this study. However, by serving as a subject, you may help us learn how to benefit patients in the future. For more information on how to participate, please contact Susan O'Connor, RN, at (503) 721-1091.

Recruiting OHSU Studies

Quantification of the Antidyskinetic Effect of Amantadine and Topiramate in Parkinson Disease Study OHSU eIRB# 4717

Principal Investigator: Kathryn Chung, M.D.

The purpose of this research study is to measure the reduction of dyskinesia in Parkinson's Disease (PD). In order to take part in the study, participants must: (1) have Parkinson's Disease, (2) have either mild, moderate to severe dyskinesia, and (3) also be taking oral Levodopa, Sinemet medications for their PD. There are four visits for this study. The first visit is a screening visit and includes a neurological examination and completion of several questionnaires. The second, third, and fourth visits are overnight stays in the Oregon Clinical and Translational Research Institute (OCTRI) at Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU). Subjects will be admitted to the OCTRI the evening before study tests begin. Their usual PD medications will not be given over night, so that the Levodopa cycle may be observed the next day. You will take one of three drugs, a sugar pill, Amantadine 300 mg, or Amantadine 300 mg plus Topiramate between each overnight visit. Subjects will be studied on a force plate during performance of simple mental task and will wear inertial sensors throughout the testing day. The inertial sensors are similar to a watch. There is no direct benefit to the participant, but Parkinson's Disease patients may benefit in the future. You will be paid \$25.00 for each overnight visit you complete. Participation in this study will last 2.5 months and will involve you taking medication for 2 weeks between the 3 overnight visits.

Kathryn Chung, M.D., is the clinical investigator responsible for this study and Brenna Lobb is the study coordinator. If you are interested in participating, please call Brenna Lobb at (503) 220-8262 ext. 51871 or you can reach Kathryn Chung, MD, at (503) 220-8262 ext. 53233.

Calendar of Events

Portland Patient Education Talks

All talks listed will be held in the Portland VA Medical Center Auditorium. Please arrive early for parking. For more information or to register call (503) 721-1091.

Friday, May 21, 2010, 10a.m. to 11a.m.: Medication - Speaker to be announced

Friday, July 9, 2010, 11a.m. to 1p.m.: Caregivers - Jason Malcom, SW

Parkinson's Resources of Oregon

Tuesday April 27 12:30p.m. to 2:30p.m. PD Spring Tune Up with Richard Dewey, MD. Participants can expect to sharpen their knowledge of PD symptoms and management, therapy options, and what is on the horizon for PD treatment. Held at the at the Old Spaghetti Factory in Portland. There is no charge, but seating is limited and reservations are required. Call (800) 426-6806 to register.

Saturday May 1: Strike Out PD - an annual bowling event hosted by Roger and Karen Anderson at Sunset Lanes in Beaverton, OR. Registration information is available at (800) 426-6806.

Sunday May 2: Shakers' Ball - an annual music fest showcasing local musicians honoring their friend Rob Barteletti. The event is held at the McMenamins Kennedy School in Portland. Tickets go on sale in March. (800) 426-6806

Movement Classes: Weekly fitness classes held in a variety of locations providing instruction for people with Parkinson's. Call: (800) 426-6806

TANGO! Classes: Classes allow you to learn and practice a variety of dances over six weeks. Attend alone or with a partner. Classes are located in SE Portland on Friday evenings. April 16th - May 21st 6:00p.m. - 7:00 p.m. Visit www.proeventbrite.com for more information.

Parkinson's Center of Oregon (PCO)

Newly Diagnosed Educational Session: Occurs every other month. For more information call (503) 494-9054.

Saturday April 24 9a.m. to 3p.m. OHSU School of Nursing Auditorium: "Insights & Inspiration for Living with Parkinson's Disease" Are you 60 years of age or younger and living with Parkinson's disease? Are you a loved one of someone who is? If so, you won't want to miss this event. More information available at www.ohsu.edu/pc

PADRECC Website

The PADRECC website provides information about Parkinson's Disease and other movement disorders, as well as services available to veterans and their caregivers. Here are some things you can find on the website:

- ◆ PADRECC clinic, staff, and contact information
- ◆ Information about Parkinson's Disease and its treatments
- ◆ Information about support groups and outside resources
- ◆ Patient Education events

Check out the newly updated PADRECC Website at: <http://www.visn20.med.va.gov/portland/PADRECC>

To receive the Parkinsonian by e-mail please forward a request to nwpadrecc@va.gov
Call (503) 721-1091 to be removed from our mailing list



**Department of
Veteran Affairs**

Portland VA Medical Center

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3710 SW US Veterans Hospital Rd.
Portland, OR 97239
Phone: (503) 721-1091

Seattle VA Puget Sound Health Care System

Neurology 127
1660 S. Columbian Way
Seattle, WA 98108
Phone: (206) 764-2021
nwpadrecc@va.gov