



# *Diet and Digestive Health Issues in Parkinson's disease: Essential Facts for Patients*

## **CAN PARKINSON'S DISEASE AFFECT DIGESTIVE HEALTH?**

Yes. Parkinson's disease may cause a range of gastrointestinal (GI) symptoms. Sometimes medications play a role. More often, it is the disease that causes damage to the nerve fibers controlling your gut movements.

## **HOW COMMON ARE GI SYMPTOMS IN PARKINSON'S DISEASE?**

- **Constipation** is one of the most common non-motor symptoms of Parkinson's. It may be one of the first symptoms to appear. Constipation may be a direct result of Parkinson's disease. Other things can make it worse, including:
  - Reduced fluid intake
  - Diet changes
  - Reduced mobility
  - Some medications
- **Bloating sensation** is often caused by delayed stomach emptying. That may also cause nausea and abdominal pain.
- **Nausea** is sometimes a side effect of Parkinson's medications.

## **DO GI ISSUES AFFECT YOUR PARKINSON'S DISEASE MEDICATIONS?**

GI issues can have an effect on your medication. This includes Levodopa, which is most often used for Parkinson's.

- Delayed stomach emptying may impair absorption. This usually happens after meals.
- Food intake may also interfere with Levodopa absorption. Talk with your doctor about when to eat and when to take your medication.

## **HOW CAN DIET HELP IMPROVE GI SYMPTOMS IN PARKINSON'S DISEASE?**

If you need help managing constipation, you may want to try to:

- Increase fiber-rich foods, like:
  - Bran fiber
  - Whole wheat products
  - Prunes
  - Lentils
  - Beans
  - Apricots

- Drink more fluids
- Include fermented milk products with probiotics, like yogurt, in your diet
- Increase physical activity and exercise

If delayed gastric emptying is a problem for you, try to:

- Limit your cheese, sweets, and fatty foods
- Avoid heavy meals
- Have three main meals per day
- Avoid napping or sleeping right after a meal
- Eat more of the foods you find easy to digest

## **DO NATURAL PRODUCTS OR DIETARY SUPPLEMENTS HELP?**

Many people think "natural" products and supplements are best. But there is no proof they help with Parkinson's. Here are some things to keep in mind:

- Parkinson's medications may lower B vitamin levels in some people. B12 deficiencies may make Parkinson's symptoms worse. In most cases, a simple multivitamin can help.
- Vitamin D is important for bone health. It may help prevent osteoporosis, a common problem that can result in more fractures for those who are prone to falling. Regular sun exposure is the most natural way to get Vitamin D.
- Be sure to talk with your doctor if you have questions about natural products or supplements.

## **CAN MEDICATIONS IMPROVE GI ISSUES IN PARKINSON'S DISEASE?**

If the lifestyle and dietary suggestions here do not help, be sure to talk with your doctor. There are medication options to help you.

Talk to your doctor if you have problems with constipation. Your doctor may suggest medications to help. A bulking agent, like Metamucil is one option. You may also want to try an herbal preparation, like Senna. If those don't work for you, other stimulant laxatives can be prescribed. These may be in the form of pills, powder or liquid preparations. Medications that increase bowel motility may also help.

If you have delayed gastric emptying, food stays in your stomach much longer than it should. This happens sometimes in people who have both Parkinson's and diabetes. If you have diabetes, it's important to keep tight control of your blood sugar. Your treatment team can help you with the right medications, diet and physical activity.