

## **VOICE AND PARKINSON'S DISEASE**

### **Why is it important?**

Many people with Parkinson's disease (PD) will experience problems with their voice. The most common communication disorder is hypokinetic dysarthria, a speech disorder that causes rigidity and slowness of the systems of communication including breathing, swallowing, voice and speech.

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

### **Sound familiar?**

- My husband/wife needs a hearing aid.
- I just want to get what I ordered in the restaurant.
- 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.

### **Symptoms that may indicate hypokinetic dysarthria**

In the same way that PD can cause slowness, rigidity, tremor, and difficulty with initiation of movement, it can also affect your breathing, your voice and your speech. You may experience one or more of the following symptoms:

- Reduced volume, even when you think you are speaking loudly
- Hoarse voice quality
- Monotone in conversation
- Imprecise articulation
- Vocal tremor
- Change in rate of speech

## Evaluation and treatment

Evaluation and treatment of hypokinetic dysarthria is performed by a Speech Language Pathologist. You may also need to meet with an Ear, Nose and Throat specialist.

The Lee Silverman Voice Treatment® for PD is an evidence based treatment for voice disorders. It is an intensive and unique speech therapy specifically designed for the communication problems experienced by people with PD.

Discuss your communication difficulties with your physician and request a referral to a Speech Language Pathologist. Information on LSVT® certified clinicians can be found at [www.lsvtglobal.org](http://www.lsvtglobal.org)

As only a small number of speech language pathologists are certified in LSVT® at present, you may not have one in your area. If this is the case, a referral to another Speech Language Pathologist would be important.

## Self-help for a stronger voice

- Make sure you have 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.

*Source: Sherri Zelazny, Registered Speech Language Pathologist, Director, Parkinson Society British Columbia Board of Directors*

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