



# Parkinson's Disease & Nutrition

**Parkinson's disease (PD)** is a chronic movement disorder. PD involves the failure and death of vital nerve cells in the brain, called neurons. Some of these neurons produce **dopamine**, a chemical involved in bodily movements and coordination. As PD progresses, the amount of dopamine produced in the brain decreases, leaving a person unable to control movement normally.

Primary motor signs of Parkinson's disease include the following:

- **Tremor** of the hands, arms, legs, jaw, and face
- **Bradykinesia** or slowness of movement
- **Rigidity** or stiffness of the limbs and trunk
- **Postural instability** or impaired balance and coordination

Common nutritional concerns for people with Parkinson's disease are:

- Unplanned weight loss
- Difficulty eating due to uncontrollable movements
- Swallowing dysfunction
- Constipation
- Medication side effects (e.g., dry mouth)



Nutritional concerns vary by individual based on signs and symptoms and stages of disease. It is important to work closely with a doctor or dietitian to determine specific recommendations.

**Wesley Glen**  
(614) 888-7492

**Wesley Ridge**  
(614) 759-0023

**Life Center**  
(614) 866-7212



### When it comes to nutrition, what matters most?

- **Increase calories.** If a tremor is present, calorie needs are much higher. Adding sources of fat to foods (e.g., oil and cheese) is one way to do this.
- **Maintain a balanced diet.** Eating properly involves eating regularly. If uncontrollable movements or swallowing difficulties are making it hard to eat, seek the advice of an occupational or speech therapist.
- **Maintain bowel regularity.** Do so with **foods high in fiber** (whole grain bread, bran cereals or muffins, fruits and vegetables, beans and legumes) and **drinking plenty of fluids.**
- **Balance medications and food.** Individuals taking carvidopa-levadopa may need to adjust the amount of protein eaten and the time of day it is eaten, or take their medication with orange juice. If side effects such as dry mouth are making it difficult to eat, work with a health care professional to help manage these.
- **Adjust nutritional priorities for your situation and stage of disease.**

Check with a dietitian or doctor for your specific dietary needs.



*Additional Notes:*