

# Young Onset Parkinson Disease and

## Physical Therapy

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### Fact Sheet

Produced by



A Special Interest  
Group of



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### What is Young Onset Parkinson Disease (YOPD)?

While the average age is around 62 years for the first symptoms of Parkinson disease (PD) to appear, “young onset Parkinson disease” is defined as PD diagnosed by the age of 40 (sometimes 50). Genetics have now been implicated in the cause of a subtype of YOPD. Up to 50% of people with YOPD may have one of these genes.

### Symptoms:

Symptoms of PD at any age of onset include the following:

- Motor symptoms: Tremor, stiffness, slowed movement, and loss of balance.
- Non-motor symptoms frequently associated with the disease include: depression, sleep disorders, fatigue, changes in vision and smell, constipation, urinary incontinence, as well as changes in memory, cognition and behavior.

### Differences from Typical PD:

There are some symptoms and disease characteristics that appear differently in people with YOPD. Research suggests people with YOPD have:

- Slower progression of the disease.
- Greater rate of dystonia (sustained abnormal postures, e.g., bending/ arching of the foot/toes) at disease onset and during treatment.
- Lower rate of dementia.
- Greater rate of dyskinesia (abnormal involuntary writhing, fidgety or jerky types of movements) in response to levodopa treatment.
- Greater motor fluctuations when taking levodopa medication due to the effects of medication wearing off approximately 4 hours after taking a dose. Motor fluctuations can appear as alterations between no symptoms or dyskinesia during “on” periods and dystonia during “off” periods of medication.
- Less likely to have tremor early in disease.
- Increased risk of depression and for poor emotional well-being (quality of life) independent of depression status.
- Increased risk of excessive daytime sleepiness.

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Unique considerations for people with YOPD are:

- Treatment options related to longer duration having the disease
- Maintaining employment
- Managing family relationships with children and spouse
- Types of health and disability insurance
- Financial and health care long term planning

There are several medications that can treat the symptoms of Parkinson disease. In addition, physical therapy and regular exercise can help people with PD to manage motor and non-motor symptoms.

### How Can Physical Therapy (PT) Help YOPD?

Recent research suggests that regular exercise not only helps manage motor and non-motor symptoms of PD, but also may help slow the disease progression. Early and consistent access to PT provided at regular intervals is recommended to address mobility challenges and to prolong independence.

A physical therapist (PT) will provide individualized guidance and recommendations for persons with PD on the following:

- Aerobic and resistance training
- Balance and flexibility exercises
- Community-based exercise classes
- Gait (walking) training
- Task specific training (such as strategies to improve safety and independence with functional tasks you're having difficulties with)
- Behavior modification

Recommendations will be modified and tailored depending on your specific mobility challenges and stage of disease progression.

Links to resources:

<http://www.youngparkinsons.org/>

<https://www.parkinson.org/library/videos/stages>

<https://www.parkinson.org/understanding-parkinsons>