

'Letter to my Friends and Family'

I have Parkinson's Disease. It is not catching or hereditary. No one knows what causes it, but some of the dopamine cells in the brain begin to die at an accelerated rate. Everyone slowly loses some dopamine cells as they grow older. If the cells suddenly begin to die at a faster rate, Parkinson's disease develops. It is slowly progressive and usually occurs as people get older. Medicine can help. I'll take newer, stronger kinds over the years. Some make me sick and need lots of adjustment. Stick with me. I have good days and bad days.

Tremors

You are expecting me to shake. Maybe I will, maybe I won't. Medicine today takes care of some of the tremors. If my hands, feet or head are shaky, ignore it. I will sit on my hand or put it in my pocket. Treat me as you always have. What is a little shakiness between friends?

My face

You think you don't entertain me anymore because I am not grinning or laughing. If I appear to stare at you or have a wooden expression, that's the Parkinson's. I hear you, I have the same intelligence. It just isn't so easy to show facial expression. If swallowing is a problem I may drool. This bothers me, so we'll mop up.

Stiffness

We are ready to go somewhere and as I get up, I can hardly move. Maybe my medicine is wearing off. This stiffness or rigidity is part of the Parkinson's. Let me take my time. Keep talking, I'll get there eventually. Trying to hurry me up won't help. I can't hurry. I must take my time. If I seem jerky as I start out, that's normal. It will lessen as I get moving.

Exercise

I need to walk every day. I will do as much as I can. Encourage me to do a little more each day. Walk with me. Company makes walking fun. It may be a slow walk but I will get there. Remind me if I slump or stoop. I don't always know I am doing this. My stretching, bending, pushing exercises must be done every day. Help with them if you can.

My voice

As my deeper tones disappear, you will notice my voice is getting higher and wispy. That's the Parkinson's. Listen to me. I know you can talk louder, faster, and finish my sentences for me. I hate that! Let me talk, get my thoughts together, and speak for myself. I'm still there. My mind is OK, because I am slow in movement, I talk more slowly too. I want to be part of the conversation. Let me speak.

Sleepiness

I may complain that I can't sleep. If I wander in the middle of the night, that's the Parkinson's. It has nothing to do with what I ate or how early I went to bed. I may nap during the day. Let me sleep when I can. I can't always control when I'm tired or feel like sleeping.

Emotions

Sometimes I cry and appear to be upset and you think you have done something to hurt my feelings. Probably not. It is the Parkinson's. Keep talking to me, ignore my tears. I'll be OK in a few minutes.

Patience, my friend, I need you. I'm the same person, I've just slowed down. It's not easy to talk about Parkinson's, but I'll try if you want me to. I need my friends. I want to continue to be part of life. Please remain my friend.