



SADA

THE SOUTH AFRICAN
DENTAL ASSOCIATION

*Patient Education
Information
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**Unite for
Parkinson's
Awareness**

What is Parkinson's Disease?

- Parkinson's disease is a progressive neurodegenerative disorder that affects movement. Symptoms generally develop slowly over years. The progression of symptoms usually varies from person to person due to the diversity of the disease. The most common symptoms are:
- Tremors – usually in a limb, while at rest
- Slowed Movement (Bradykinesia)
- Stiff muscles
- Diminished posture and balance
- Loss of autonomic movements i.e., movements such as blinking, smiling and swallowing.

How does Parkinson's affect dental health?

- Physical issues such as stiff muscles, shaking, uncontrolled movements, and even lack of balance can prevent a person with Parkinson's from maintaining good oral hygiene which can lead to gingivitis, periodontitis and teeth mobility.
- Parkinson's can change face and tongue muscle function, affecting chewing and swallowing.

- Medications used to treat Parkinson's are usually associated with reduced saliva, which may place the patient at a higher risk of developing cavities.
- Certain medications such as Levodopa, when used for several years, may lead to developing involuntary movements which can affect the jaw and cause cracked teeth and teeth grinding.
- Cognitive symptoms of Parkinson's, such as depression, and forgetfulness, may lead a person with Parkinson's to pay less attention to his or her daily oral hygiene.

How should a patient with Parkinson's maintain their oral health?

- Use a toothbrush with a large-handled grip and a small head with soft bristles. An electric toothbrush is also a viable option.
- Try to brush after every meal for two minutes, and also brush the tongue using the stronger side of the body. Obtain help from your care partner if necessary for flossing.
- Avoid using mouthwashes due to the risk of choking but if still an option, use one that is non-alcohol based and does not contain chlorhexidine.
- If you have dentures, remove them after each meal, then brush and rinse them.

How may a Parkinson's patient improve dental visits?

- Schedule early morning visits, when waiting times tend to be shorter.
- Take prescribed medication such as Levodopa 60 to 90 minutes before the office visit.
- Inform your dentist about your condition and symptoms when making the appointment as well as all the medications you are on as certain medications may interact with anaesthetics.
- Ask to keep the dental chair more upright, to make swallowing easier and helps prevent choking.
- Plan several, shorter dentist visits, rather than ones that are longer in duration.

Your oral healthcare practitioner is available to discuss your treatment and concerns. Patients and/or caregivers should utilize this resource to ensure optimal treatment is possible.