



SENIOR HEALTH

Helping Patients With Parkinson's Disease

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Parkinson's disease (PD), a long-term degenerative disorder of the central nervous system that mainly affects motor function, has a slow onset over time. In the early stages of the disease symptoms include shaking, rigidity, slowness of movement, and difficulty with walking. Dementia is another symptom, but generally happens in the advanced stages of the disease. Depression and anxiety can also occur, and do so in more than one-third of people with PD. Other symptoms include sensory, sleep, and emotional problems.¹

According to the Parkinson's Disease Foundation, the cause of the disease is unknown, but believed to involve both genetic and environmental factors. Those with a family member affected are more likely to get the disease themselves.² Although there is an increased risk for people exposed to certain pesticides and those who have had prior head injuries, there is a reduced risk in tobacco smokers and those who drink coffee or tea.³

Acupuncture helps support cognitive function and can slow the decline of symptoms. A study done in 2002 by the Department of Neurology at the University of Maryland School of Medicine, revealed 20 Parkinson's patients were treated with acupuncture for 16 sessions. Eighty-five percent of those patients reported subjective improvements of individual symptoms, including tremors, walking, handwriting, slowness, pain, sleep, depression and anxiety. There were no adverse effects.

Early research is showing that acupuncture can relieve age-related cognitive decline symptoms because it generates a neural response in the putamen and the thalamus, which are particularly affected by Parkinson's disease.



Acupuncture successfully reduces pain, autonomic nervous system dysfunction, and mental illness in Parkinson's disease patients. Researchers from Fukushima Medical University delivered the patient care and collected the data. Additional support came from investigators at the Department of Neurology, Hematology, Metabolism, Endocrinology and Diabetology (Yamagata University). The case history documents acupuncture's ability to address specific concerns of an 81 year old female patient suffering from Parkinson's disease. Complications included a history of hypertension and lumbar fracture. The patient had been prescribed medications including anti-inflammatory and psychiatric drugs. Her symptoms persisted so acupuncture was initiated.

Manual acupuncture was applied at acupuncture points: LR3, LI4, KI5, KI7, SP6, GB34, BL18, BL15, GB20. Needles were retained for 10 minutes per session. Electroacupuncture at 1 Hz for 7 minutes was applied to: KI10, LR9, BL23, BL25. The researchers noted that the electroacupuncture was applied to relax the muscle tension. Seirin brand acupuncture needles of 40 - 50 mm length and 0.14 - 0.18 diameter were used. The researchers noted that Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) theory guided the needle selection process. UB15, LR3, and SP6 were chosen for their ability to treat both depression and anxiety. LR3, KI7, BL18, and GB34 were chosen for their ability to treat hot flashes and paroxysmal sweating.

The researchers noted that the patient's lower leg pain decreased. Hot flashes and paroxysmal sweating incidences were reduced. The patient showed very significant reductions in depression and anxiety scores. Also, her *steps* became larger and there was a serious reduction in bradykinesia, a complication often correlated with Parkinson's disease characterized by slowness and impairment of movements and reflexes.

In addition to acupuncture, nutritional considerations should be thought-about. However, many supplements may interact with medications taken for Parkinson's or may only work in particular doses. Commonly used supplements to support brain function include:

- Coenzyme Q₁₀ (CoQ₁₀) – Some studies suggest high doses of CoQ₁₀ may slow the progression of Parkinson's in early stages. CoQ₁₀ can promote blood clotting and can interact with blood thinners such as warfarin (Coumadin), clopidogrel (Plavix), or aspirin. CoQ₁₀ may lower blood pressure and interact with some chemotherapy drugs.
- Vitamin C and vitamin E. In one study these antioxidant vitamins (in high doses) helped delay the need for medication. But taking Vitamin E alone did not appear to have the same affect.
- Vitamin D. Oftentimes Parkinson's patients have low vitamin D levels.
- Vitamin B₆ (pyridoxine) has been used in Parkinson's but is controversial because it can reduce efficacy of some prescription medications. Some holistic professionals use it to counteract the side affects of the medications.

There is no quick fix for Parkinson's, but that does not mean you cannot help. It is important to take the time to work with the patient and understand their needs— how the disease is affecting them and what their goals with treatment are. Often just having someone take the time to care and listen can be remarkably therapeutic. Acupuncture is a powerful tool and can greatly help many of the symptoms of the disease at any stage. Nutritional support is also vital— the body cannot heal without the essential compounds for growth and repair. When dealing with nutritional or herbal supplementation, it is important to make sure your care is coordinated with the primary managing physician. As always, remember to completely and clearly document your findings, correlate with the patient's case history, and logically outline your care plan. These extra notes help document the severity the patients' complaints and can then show the progressive response to care. Also, documentation can also help make the difference if you must justify your diagnosis and treatment to an insurer or third party.

References

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Resources

1. Parkinson's Parkinson's Disease Information Page, National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke ([NIH](#)).
2. Parkinson's Parkinson's Disease [Foundation](#)
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