

Understanding Parkinson's disease–related hallucinations and delusions

Are hallucinations and delusions an aspect of Parkinson's?

Hallucinations (seeing, hearing, or experiencing things that others don't) and **delusions** (believing things that aren't true) are non-motor symptoms of Parkinson's disease. Together they are known as **Parkinson's disease psychosis**. Around half of people living with Parkinson's may experience hallucinations or delusions over the course of their disease.

What causes these hallucinations and delusions?

Currently, there is no clear understanding of the exact cause of Parkinson's disease-related hallucinations and delusions. However, **certain brain chemicals and receptors (such as dopamine and serotonin) are believed to play a role**. In general, the condition is thought to be caused by the following:

Side effect of dopamine therapy

Hallucinations and delusions may be a side effect of common Parkinson's medications (called dopaminergic therapies). These medications increase dopamine levels in the brain, helping improve motor symptoms in patients with Parkinson's. However, increasing dopamine levels can also cause changes that lead to hallucinations and delusions.

Natural progression of Parkinson's

Hallucinations and delusions can be triggered by changes in the brain that occur naturally as Parkinson's progresses—regardless of whether or not you take any medications to increase your dopamine levels.

Who is at risk for developing these symptoms?

There's no way to accurately predict which people with Parkinson's will go on to develop hallucinations and delusions. **A number of risk factors are associated with the condition**. Some of these risk factors include: age, disease duration, and severity of Parkinson's.

How do people with Parkinson's disease describe their hallucinations or delusions?

In describing these symptoms, people may use such common terms as:



SEEING THINGS THAT OTHERS DON'T

Such as people, animals, or objects



HEARING THINGS THAT OTHERS DON'T

Such as hearing sounds, music, or voices



PARANOIA

Such as believing people are talking about you, or trying to access your money



FALSE BELIEFS

Such as fears of loved ones stealing from you, putting you in harm's way, or being unfaithful

Why isn't there a greater awareness of Parkinson's hallucinations and delusions?

It is common for people living with Parkinson's disease–related hallucinations and delusions to remain silent about these symptoms and not report them to a healthcare provider. Work continues to be done to raise awareness of this condition. You can find more information on the non-motor symptoms associated with Parkinson's from any of the following organizations:



apdaparkinson.org



davisphinneyfoundation.org



michaelfox.org



parkinson.org



pmdalliance.org

How can I get help?

First, and most importantly, if you or a loved one is experiencing symptoms such as hallucinations or delusions, **speak to your healthcare provider**. It is essential to talk about your full range of Parkinson's disease symptoms with your treatment team. A dialogue among patients, caregivers, and physicians is a critical component of the effective management of your condition.

Be sure to ask your healthcare provider about all of your symptoms—and what can be done to help, including treatment options.