PARKINSON'S AND THE EYES

The most commonly reported eye problems by people with Parkinson’s are blurred vision, double vision, excessive watering of the eyes and dry eyes. As with many other aspects of Parkinson’s these problems may be exacerbated by fatigue.

Whilst some eye and vision problems may be related to the Parkinson’s itself others may be caused by medications.

**Blurred vision/ Difficulty focusing**
Blurred vision can be caused by difficulty moving the eyes but can also be a side effect of anti-Parkinson’s drugs, particularly anticholinergics such as Cogentin or Disipal. The problem can often occur when anticholinergics are first taken and it may improve with time. It can also occur when the drugs have been taken for a long time or when an adjustment has been made to dosage. If blurred vision persists or worsens consult your doctor.

If you already wear glasses, a slight modification to these may improve blurred vision. This is probably only appropriate for people who are settled on a drug regime which is likely to be relatively long-term.

**Double vision**
Double vision in Parkinson’s is often caused by problems in moving the eyes and, in particular, by problems of tracking. ‘Tracking’ refers to the eyes moving in alignment from side to side, for example moving across a page when reading. Impaired co-ordination and fatigue of the muscles that move the eyeballs can mean that the eyeballs do not move together in alignment. This can cause double vision.

The problem of double vision is usually improved by anti-Parkinson’s medication. Resting the eyes when double vision occurs is wise and should provide relief.

There can be other causes of double vision that are unrelated to Parkinson’s. If the problem persists, consult an ophthalmologist (doctor who specialises in the care of the eyes).

**Dry eyes**
People with Parkinson’s often find that they blink less frequently. Blinking helps to cleanse the eyes by removing dust and impurities. If the rate of blinking is reduced these impurities can build up making the eyes dry or sore. Artificial tears, available from pharmacies can help as can avoiding dry, hot and smoky atmospheres. On rare occasions dry eyes can lead to conjunctivitis. The treatment for this is usually antibiotics from the doctor.

**Difficulty moving the eyes**
This may be noticed as a difficulty in beginning a movement of the eyes or an inability to move the eyes quickly. It may be more evident when looking at a fast moving object such as in motor-racing or watching tennis. Sometimes the smooth movement of the eyes is impaired and instead they move in a slow and jerky way. The inability to move the eyes quickly can have implications for activities such as driving.

Difficulties in moving the eyes are usually improved by Parkinson’s medications. Advice should be sought from your doctor.
**Sensitivity to contrast**
Some people with Parkinson’s find that they have difficulty seeing in low light levels. They may also be unable to clearly make out the shape of images, such as a light coloured object on a light background. This may also affect the ease with which fine print can be read. This problem may improve with the treatment of levodopa.

**Colour vision**
Some people with Parkinson’s may have difficulty in discriminating between small difference in colour. This problem may be worse for shades of blue or blue/green. As with contrast vision, colour vision may improve with anti-Parkinson’s drug treatment.

**Visuo-spatial orientation**
Some people with Parkinson’s seem to have difficulty in judging the space around them. They may not be able to accurately assess the distance between objects and might experience problems in negotiating their own route when walking past objects or through a narrow space. Problems of this type seem to be worse in people whose Parkinson’s affects the left side of their body. Some people are helped by reaching out to touch the sides of doorways or other objects. It is possible that an occupational therapist could help with advice about organising space and carrying out everyday activities.

It should be remembered that problems with visuo-spatial orientation can affect driving as well as walking.

People with Parkinson’s can experience a range of problems with their eyes and eyesight. Whilst these problems are sometimes related to the Parkinson’s or the drugs used to treat it, it is important to remember that many difficulties with eyesight may be due to other factors. Whatever the cause of the problem, it is important to seek professional advice.

(Source: Adapted from a PDS UK information sheet)

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Please do not interpret anything in this fact sheet as personal medical advice, always check any medical problem with your Doctor.

Further information may be obtained from your local branch of Parkinsons New Zealand or Freephone 0800 473 463