

Coping With a Loved One's Parkinson's Diagnosis

You've suddenly found yourself in the role of caring for someone with Parkinson's disease. Learn what you can, help when you can, and remember to tend to your own needs.

Finding out your loved one has Parkinson's disease can cause a deluge of emotions, leaving you feeling numb, disoriented, and fragmented. It can take time to come to terms with the fact that your partner, friend, or family member is going to become more and more out of touch with her own body and less and less able to control her own movements.

As a Parkinson's disease caregiver, you'll need to prepare yourself for the time when your loved one will really need physical assistance. You'll also need to be able to provide emotional support for a person who's learned that she has a chronic and progressive illness. The road ahead may look overwhelming, but you can do it if you remember to look after yourself as well as your loved one.

Identifying Your Loved One's Needs

A Parkinson's diagnosis can shatter the emotional well-being of a newly-diagnosed patient. People often go into some form of denial after being told they have Parkinson's disease. Other emotional responses can include fear, grief, anger, and depression.

As a caregiver, you will need to provide a stable source of support for your loved one. And despite how contradictory this sounds, that means you need to take special care of yourself now too. It's often easy when caring for someone else to put your needs aside in favor of your loved one's, but that could lead to you burning out and being unable to provide long-term care. Please keep in mind that HisGrip Home Care has experienced caregivers and can help you relieve the burden by providing care for as little as 3 hours per visit.

Constructive Advice

Some things you can do to keep yourself healthy while caring for someone with Parkinson's disease include:

- **Jotting down your thoughts.** Since Parkinson's disease is a disease of loss, many of your feelings and thoughts will revolve around loss. Consider keeping a journal to stimulate your mind and help you think of creative ways to preserve quality of life for both you and your loved one.
- **Educating yourself.** The more you know about the disease, the more secure you'll feel about providing help.
- **Finding someone you can talk to.** Just as you're listening to your loved one's feelings and worries, you need someone to listen to yours. Find a friend or family member with whom you can speak openly. If there's no one available, look into joining a support group or seeking psychotherapy.

- **Going on with your life.** Don't stop meeting with friends or participating in hobbies or groups in lieu of your caregiver responsibilities. Doing that will set you up to feel resentful in the long run. Maintain your schedule as normally as you can. Keeping outside contacts and interests will help you to feel refreshed and energized when you return to your loved one.
- **Getting help.** Don't stop meeting with friends or participating in hobbies or groups in

Parkinson's Diagnosis: Caregiver Support

Support groups are essential for many caregivers. They provide a place to share feelings and concerns, and also a means to learn more about how to best care for a person with Parkinson's disease. To find a support group in your area, you can check with:

- Your loved one's doctor
- Local hospitals
- The phone book
- Community calendars in local newspapers and magazines
- Web sites of national organizations like the **National Parkinson Foundation**; the **Parkinson's Disease Foundation**; the **American Parkinson Disease Association**; and the **Michael J. Fox Foundation**.

Maintaining some control, finding outlets for your feelings and interests, and learning about this disease can help you face your new role as caregiver with confidence and hope.