Care Team | Neurologist

Neurologists are a key part of the Parkinson's care team. They help navigate challenges posed by the condition through suggested lifestyle changes, medications and advanced therapies.

What is a neurologist?

A neurologist is a medical doctor specialising in diagnosing and treating disorders affecting the nervous system, including the brain, spinal cord, nerves, and muscles. They are trained to evaluate and manage a wide range of neurological conditions, such as epilepsy, stroke, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's, Alzheimer's disease, and neuropathies.

Some neurologists have further subspecialty training as Movement Disorder Specialists (MDS); these doctors have the most expertise in PD.

Sometimes older people with PD are referred to geriatricians. These are doctors specialising in caring for elderly people. Many geriatricians are very familiar with the treatment of PD, and this is a particularly good option if an elderly person has multiple or complex non-neurological health issues.

Why see a neurologist?

Seeing a neurologist is crucial for managing Parkinson's. Neurologists are medical doctors who specialise in diagnosing and treating disorders affecting the nervous system, including Parkinson's.

They guide patients through treatment options and connect them to clinical trials, support networks and other resources.

Neurologists CAN:

- clinically diagnose Parkinson's by evaluating symptoms and conducting neurological examinations
- monitor the condition as it progresses
- develop tailored treatment plans to manage symptoms and improve quality of life
- help people make informed decisions about lifestyle changes that can significantly impact brain health and overall wellbeing
- prescribe and adjust medications to address symptoms such as tremors, stiffness, and bradykinesia
- adjust medications to address your most bothersome symptoms – these may change over time.
- refer you to other specialists, such as physiotherapists or speech pathologists, for comprehensive care.

Neurologists CANNOT:

- Neurologists do not perform surgeries; this is typically done by neurosurgeons.
- They do not provide daily care or personal assistance; this is managed by caregivers and healthcare professionals.
- While they can offer medical advice, they do not provide non-medical support such as financial or legal advice.

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Benefits of seeing a neurologist:

- Regular monitoring helps detect and address complications or co-morbidities early.
- Regular visits can help manage symptoms and side effects in a timelier manner.
- Neurologists can provide access to the latest lifestyle recommendations, new treatments and clinical trials.
- They offer individualised care plans based on your specific needs.

How do I access a neurologist?

Access to neurologists in Australia can vary, especially in regional areas. It's important to find a neurologist experienced in treating movement disorders and neurological conditions like Parkinson's.

Your general practitioner (GP) can refer you to a neurologist. In Australia, you may be directed to a neurologist in your public hospital catchment.

Some hospitals and clinics have neurologists specialising in PD.

Use online directories to find private practice neurologists with experience in treating Parkinson's.

Don't be afraid to seek a second or even third opinion, as you will have a long relationship with your neurologist, and it needs to be the right fit for you.

Tips to prepare for a neurology appointment

Before the appointment

- Check your referral is current so you can claim Medicare rebates.
- Confirm any test results (scans, blood tests) are available at least a week beforehand.
- Tell the specialist in advance if you need forms completed (NDIS, insurance, licence).
- Make notes about key symptoms or changes since your last visit.

On the day

- Allow extra travel and parking time; call ahead if delayed.
- Expect possible delays and stay in touch with the clinic receptionist.
- Wear clothing that allows easy examination.
- Bring a support person if possible.
- Bring an up-to-date medication list, including timing of Parkinson's medicines.

Medication considerations

- Take note if medication improves symptoms and when effects start or wear off.
- Consider timing around meals, especially protein.
- Record any missed doses or side effects.

Non-motor symptoms to note

- Mood changes, low motivation, temperature intolerance.
- Sleep issues.
- Bladder or bowel problems.

During the appointment

- Bring a written list of questions, with the most important at the top.
- Ask for clarification if you don't understand something.
- Confirm any medication or test changes before leaving.

After the appointment

- Ask for a copy of the clinic letter and any results.
- Confirm how to contact the specialist between visits.

Infosheet kindly reviewed by Professor David Blacker AM, MB BS, FRACP, Clinical Professor, Perron Institute. For most of his career, he was a stroke neurologist and researcher. In 2018, he was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. He writes and speaks widely about his personal experience and hopes to assist others by sharing this.

He aims to help his medical colleagues gain a greater insight into living with PD and to improve their communication and interactions with people with PD. He has written a book, "My FIGHT with PD" which covers these issues.

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