

# Apathy & Motivation in Parkinson's



## Signs of Apathy

- Less interest in activities once enjoyed
- Spending more time without a clear purpose
- Needing reminders to start or finish daily tasks
- Less emotional response (for example, feeling “flat” or less excited)
- Withdrawing from conversations or social activities
- Trouble staying engaged in activities (for example, losing focus or interest more easily)

Many people with Parkinson's disease (PD) experience changes in motivation. Starting or finishing everyday activities can take more effort, and what once felt important may feel less meaningful. This is called apathy. It is often misunderstood as not trying or not caring, but it is related to changes in the brain that affect motivation.

## Quick Facts

- About 40% of people with PD experience apathy.
- It can become more difficult to keep up with daily routines, social connection and managing Parkinson's symptoms.
- Apathy can look similar to other symptoms, such as depression or fatigue.

## Understanding Apathy

Parkinson's affects chemicals in the brain, including dopamine, that help drive motivation and action. As dopamine and other brain chemicals decrease, it can become harder to start daily tasks, participate in activities or stay active.

Apathy can change over time and may be more noticeable as Parkinson's progresses or when thinking changes are present.

Apathy, depression and fatigue are different, though someone can have more than one at the same time. Depression involves sadness, guilt or hopelessness, while fatigue is physical or mental exhaustion. With apathy, mood is often flat rather than sad.

## How Apathy Affects Daily Life

Apathy varies from person to person. It may be mild, such as taking longer to get going or losing interest in certain activities. It may also be more noticeable, with long periods of inactivity or needing repeated prompts to take part in daily life.

Apathy can make it harder to manage Parkinson's symptoms, such as taking medications on time, staying active or attending appointments. It can also affect quality of life and relationships. People may cancel or avoid social plans, and over time, family or friends may take on a more active role in helping keep routines on track.

## Resources

### Read, Watch & Listen:

- [Parkinson.org/Library](https://www.parkinson.org/Library)  
Search "apathy"

### Join Live Events:

- [Parkinson.org/Events](https://www.parkinson.org/Events)

### Learn More:

- [Parkinson.org/Apathy](https://www.parkinson.org/Apathy)

## Helpline

For answers to your Parkinson's questions, contact our Helpline at **1-800-473-4636** or [Helpline@Parkinson.org](mailto:Helpline@Parkinson.org).

**We are here for you.**

## Recognizing Apathy in Parkinson's

Apathy can be hard to recognize because it often looks like depression, fatigue or thinking changes. Unlike depression, someone with apathy may not recognize symptoms or feel distressed by them. Family members or friends are often the first to notice that someone isn't as active or involved as they used to be. A care team can ask questions, review medications and look for other possible causes.

## Treatment Options for Apathy

Treating apathy in Parkinson's can be challenging. There is no single medication specifically for apathy. Your care team can look at different factors that may be affecting motivation. Managing apathy often involves trying different approaches to find what helps.

### Medications

Reviewing and adjusting Parkinson's medications. Dopamine changes can affect motivation, though the impact on apathy varies.

### Treating Related Conditions

Depression, sleep problems and thinking changes can affect motivation and may need treatment.

### Everyday Strategies

An occupational therapist can help set up a daily schedule, plan activities, break tasks into steps and use reminders or cues (such as alarms or written notes). These approaches can make it easier to keep up with daily activities and stay connected with others.

## How Family, Friends and Care Partners Can Help

Apathy can be frustrating and hard to understand, especially when it affects health and relationships. Family members, friends and care partners can help with gentle prompts, shared activities and a consistent daily routine. Encouragement and support are often more helpful than pressure.



## Tips for Managing Apathy

- **Follow a routine, even when motivation is low.** A regular schedule can make getting started more automatic over time.
- **Break tasks into small steps and focus on the first step.** Smaller steps can make tasks feel easier to approach.
- **Plan activities ahead and include others when possible.** This reduces decision-making and helps you follow through.