

Managing "Off" Time in Parkinson's



Signs of "Off" Time:

- Moving more slowly than usual
- Feeling stiff or tight
- Tremor returning or getting worse
- Shuffling or shorter steps
- Feet feeling "stuck" to the floor (freezing)
- Muscle cramps or twisting
- Feeling anxious or uneasy
- Restlessness
- Low mood or irritability
- Feeling very tired
- Trouble thinking clearly ("brain fog")
- Pain or discomfort
- Sweating

Medications play a key role in managing Parkinson's disease (PD) symptoms. Over time, the effects of each dose may not last as long. This can lead to "off" periods, when symptoms return between doses. There are steps you and your doctor can take to help reduce "off" time.

Quick Facts

- In Parkinson's, dopamine-producing brain cells are gradually lost.
- Dopamine helps control movement, mood and other functions.
- Many PD medications replace, boost or work like dopamine.

What is "off" time?

"Off" time refers to periods when Parkinson's symptoms return or worsen between doses. Symptoms may come back gradually or feel like a switch turning off as medication levels drop.

What causes "off" time?

"Off" time can happen for several reasons:

1. Less dopamine available

As Parkinson's progresses, the brain has less dopamine. Because of this, the same medication amount and schedule may not last as long, and symptoms can return between doses.

2. Shorter, less steady medication effects

Over time, the brain becomes less able to store and release dopamine steadily. This means each dose may not provide the same smooth, long-lasting symptom relief it once did.

3. Food and digestion

High-protein or large meals, along with constipation or slow digestion, can make medication work more slowly or less effectively.

4. Daily factors can play a role

Stress, poor sleep, infection or changes in routine can affect symptoms and how medicine works. This may lead to "off" periods.

When do "off" periods occur?

"Off" periods are not the same for everyone. Most happen at the end of a dose, when medicine wears off, but others may happen suddenly or at unpredictable times.

Resources

Listen:

How to Prevent Sudden "Off" Episodes podcast

- [Parkinson.org/148](https://www.parkinson.org/148)

Learn More:

Parkinson's Medications

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

Advanced Treatment Options

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

Constipation & Nausea

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

Helpline

For answers to your Parkinson's questions, contact our Helpline at **1-800-473-4636** or Helpline@Parkinson.org.

We are here for you.

How is "off" time managed?

There are several ways to help reduce "off" periods:

Track Symptoms

Keep a record of your symptoms and any factors that may affect them, like stress, activity or digestion. This can help you, your care partner and your doctor spot patterns and talk about possible treatment changes.

Manage Meals and Digestion

If food affects how your medication works, talk with your doctor about timing. Taking levodopa 30–60 minutes before meals or about an hour after eating may help. You may also need to manage constipation or slow digestion.

Adjust Medications

Your doctor may suggest changes to help reduce "off" time. This may include adjusting the timing or amount of your Parkinson's medications, using longer-acting options, adding other medications that help levodopa last longer or boost dopamine or using a quick-acting medicine for sudden "off" periods.

Finding the right balance between symptom relief and side effects can take time. For example, increasing levodopa may help reduce "off" time but can also lead to side effects, such as dyskinesia (extra, involuntary movements), dizziness (often due to drops in blood pressure) or nausea. Work closely with your doctor or a movement disorder specialist (a neurologist with extra training in Parkinson's) to find options that work for you.

Explore Advanced Treatments

If standard medications aren't enough, your doctor may discuss advanced options, such as continuous pump medications, deep brain stimulation or focused ultrasound.

Tips for Managing "Off" Time

- **Take medications on time.** Staying on schedule helps reduce unpredictable "off" periods. Timers or phone alarms can help.
- **Manage stress.** Techniques like deep breathing, yoga or meditation can help reduce symptom fluctuations.
- **Plan activities around your medication.** Save outings or bigger tasks for when your medication is working well.

