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# Parkinson's Disease Diagnosis

You probably sensed that something wasn't right. You hoped that it was something that would pass or could be easily treated, and then you learned what the diagnosis was: Parkinson's Disease. There is no one particular test that can be done to diagnose Parkinson's Disease. Parkinson's Disease is even more difficult to diagnose in the early stages, when there are less symptoms. It's not uncommon for a lot of the cardinal symptoms of the disease to be confused with natural aging in the elderly. This includes symptoms like trembling, trouble with writing, and changes in gait. Younger people may also not be diagnosed until a later stage as the disease mainly affects older people.

Diagnostic techniques range from genetic testing, testing of the olfactory and autonomic system, neurophysiological testing and neuroimaging.

## Genetic Testing

Several mutations that contribute to the pathology of Parkinson's Disease have been identified. Genetic testing allows for genetic counseling where couples can find out if they are carriers of the mutated genes and, therefore, how likely they are to pass them on to their children.

## Neuroimaging

Single-photon emission computed tomography (SPECT) is used along with a radio labeled compound. The compound will bind onto dopamine receptors and can be viewed using SPECT. This method allows the measurement of the amount of dopamine releasing neurons. PET scans are also useful and provide 3D images of the brain which allows one to analyze the unique brain of each patient.

## Olfactory system testing

The olfactory system is used by the body to detect smell. It is now well established that Parkinson's sufferers have impaired function of this system. Therefore testing this system can be an indicator of Parkinsonism. It usually involves the patient smelling a variety of odors, and then making a choice from a variety of possible answers for each one.

## Autonomic system testing

The autonomic system regulates processes in the body such as cardiovascular, respiratory and digestive function. It is also involved in salivation, perspiration, dilation of the pupils, discharge of urine, and erection. These functions are impaired by Parkinson's. Testing of the autonomic system usually involves examining breathing, heart rate, reflexes and thermoregulation (reaction to temperature). It is difficult to distinguish between Parkinson's and Multiple System Atrophy (MSA) as they share many of the same characteristics.

The important thing to realize about Parkinson's Disease is that there is no single cause method to make a positive Parkinson's Disease diagnosis. Advancements in technology have made Parkinson's Disease diagnosis more accurate. With technology like neuronimaging, one can see in 3D the damage that may be occurring in a patient's brain. Genetic testing makes it possible to view the disease at a molecular level. It can be frustrating to go through many different types of tests but it is important that your physician makes the correct diagnosis.