

# Understanding hallucinations and delusions associated with Parkinson's disease

## Are hallucinations and delusions an aspect of Parkinson's?

**Hallucinations** (seeing, hearing, or experiencing things that aren't real) and **delusions** (believing things that aren't true) are non-motor symptoms of Parkinson's disease. Together they are known as **Parkinson's disease psychosis**. More than half of people living with Parkinson's will experience hallucinations or delusions over the course of their disease.

## What causes these hallucinations and delusions?

Currently, there is no clear understanding of the exact cause of hallucinations and delusions associated with Parkinson's, although **certain brain chemicals and receptors (such as dopamine and serotonin) are believed to play a role**. In general, the condition is believed to be caused by either one of the following:

### Side effect of dopamine therapy

Hallucinations and delusions may be a side effect of common Parkinson's medications (called dopaminergic therapies). These medications increase dopamine levels in the brain, helping improve motor symptoms in patients with Parkinson's. However, increasing dopamine levels can also cause changes that lead to hallucinations and delusions.

### Natural progression of Parkinson's

Hallucinations and delusions can be triggered by changes in the brain that occur naturally as Parkinson's progresses—regardless of whether or not you take any medications to increase your dopamine levels.

## Who is at risk for developing these symptoms?

There's no predicting with certainty which people with Parkinson's will go on to develop hallucinations and delusions. **A number of risk factors—both internal and external—are associated with the condition**. Some of these risk factors include: age, duration and severity of Parkinson's, and taking medications that increase dopamine levels.

# How do people describe their hallucinations or delusions?

In describing these symptoms, people may use such common terms as:



## SEEING THINGS

Such as people, either living or deceased, animals, or objects



## PARANOIA

Believing people are talking about you, or trying to access your money



## FALSE BELIEFS

Fears of loved ones stealing from you, or being unfaithful



## OUT OF TOUCH WITH REALITY

Not being able to tell what's real or imagined

## Why isn't there a greater awareness of Parkinson's hallucinations and delusions?

It's not uncommon for people with Parkinson's disease psychosis to remain silent about their experiences. In fact, **only 10% to 20% proactively report their symptoms to their physicians.** Work continues to be done to raise awareness of this condition. You can find more information on the non-motor symptoms associated with Parkinson's from the following organization:



**DAVIS PHINNEY**  
Foundation For Parkinson's

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## How can I get help?

First, and most importantly, if you find yourself experiencing symptoms such as hallucinations or delusions, **speak out.** It is essential to talk about your full range of Parkinson's disease symptoms with your treatment team. A dialogue among patients, caregivers, and physicians is a critical component of the effective management of your condition.

Be sure to ask your healthcare provider about **all** of your symptoms—and what can be done to help, including treatment options.