



# Parkinson's Disease

Sex & Intimacy

Alexis Santangelo AGNP-C  
University Hospitals Cleveland Medical Center



## **The Purpose of this Presentation**

- To give you, the patient, more insight regarding the sexual issues many Parkinson's patients experience
- How to help patients navigate these issues

**Sex therapist, Gila Bronner MPH, MSW, CST, Director of Sex Therapy at the SHEBA Medical Center in Israel**

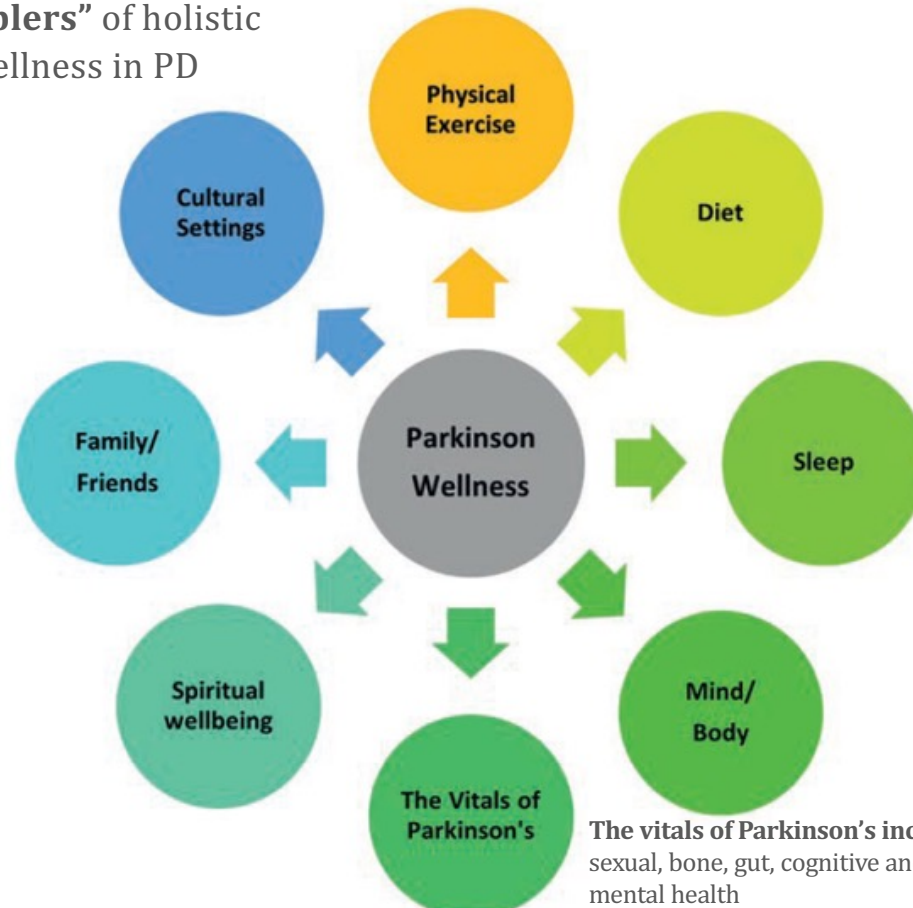
“...reminds her patients that it is important to remember that sexuality is not only about sex and orgasms; it’s emotional, non-sexual physical and intimate aspects play important parts. Intimate touch and sexual activity contribute to a better quality of life and health overall. They are associated with emotional and physical relaxation, better self-esteem, increased vitality and well-being, and closeness between partners”

<https://www.parkinson.org/blog/research/sex-intimacy-parkinsons>



# Wellness, Sexual Health and Nonmotor Parkinson's

“enablers” of holistic wellness in PD



Subramanian, Brindle, Perepezko, Chaudhuri 2022

# What Leads to the Sexual Dysfunction in PD?

- Autonomic Nervous System Dysfunction
  - involuntary physiologic processes including heart rate, blood pressure, respiration, digestion, and sexual arousal
- Physical limitations
- Lack of dopamine:
  - Coordination of smooth muscle movement becomes impaired
  - Decreased sex drive/decreased sexual interest
- Psychological limitations



## Physical Limitations

- **Motor sx:** Slow movements, tremor, rigidity make sexual coordination more difficult and can lead to pain and discomfort
- **Fatigue, pain, lack of control over movements** may make the patient with PD more passive





## Physical Limitations

- **Erectile dysfunction:** PD impacts CNS and causes inability to attain and/or maintain an erection or ejaculate
  - Issues with blood circulation to penis and pelvic muscles also contribute to ED
  - Often caused by DM, vascular disease, kidney disease, medications, psychological factors

## Physical Limitations

- **Vaginal dryness:** Inadequate lubrication can lead to painful sex and UTI
- **Lack of climax:** Affecting both men and women
  - Reduced sexual feeling and functioning make this more difficult



## Psychological Issues

- Up to 40% of patients with PD can be affected by depression
- Antidepressants can cause sexual dysfunction, not to mention other meds they may be taking (for example, propranolol)
- Emotional issues the person may be dealing with in regard to Parkinson's that can be the cause of sexual difficulties include:
  - Mental fatigue, grief, stress, anger, body image problems and decreased self-esteem.

## Side Effects to Medications

- Medications used to treat Parkinson's can cause hypersexuality
  - This is a compulsive sex drive
- Can be distressing to the patient and partner

## Psychological Issues: The Caregiver's Perspective

- Their partner may also have a difficult time and difficulties coping due to:
  - Fatigue/resentment if they are now having to do more
  - Their own grief, anxiety and depression related to the diagnosis
  - Loss of attraction and sexual interest due to symptoms of PD
    - Involuntary movements, hypomimia, changes in appearance



## Problems with the Relationship

“The relationship, including sex, becomes unfamiliar in many ways, especially for couples who have been together long term.”

- How each partner handles the diagnosis, the day to day changes/demands they deal with





## Relationship Goals



## Relationship Goals—What Can You Do?

- Talk with their provider
  - What are their concerns?
- Provider performs a med review
  - Antidepressants, propranolol or other meds causing decreased libido or decreased response?
  - Trx with dopaminergic can help ED
  - Meds specifically for ED if a candidate (uro or PCP usually prescribe)



## Communication



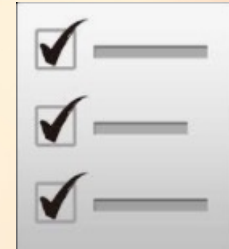
- Encourage them to be open with their partner regarding:
  - Feelings, concerns, desires
  - Avoiding discussing concerns together can cause relationship and sexual strain
  - A sex counselor can help with this
- Compliments, verbal support---all tie into boosting a person's self esteem and feeling desirable



## Timing is Everything

- Fatigue can be a limiting factor so plan around this
- Exercise
  - Help decrease fatigue and increase stamina
- Time to try something new/different
- Time to try using lubrication, different forms of stimulation and new positions

## Let's Put This into Practice



- **Address** the main issue or concern with your provider
- **Provider performs medication review** and checking for sexual SE to meds
- **Reassurance** that yes, symptoms can be due to PD but sometimes can be due to issues like depression, relationship issues as a whole or other disease processes
- **Obtain** resources for further education and problem solving
  - Referral to a sex therapist in their area if needed

## Patient Resources

### **Fact sheet: *Parkinson's Disease: Communication and Intimacy***

- <http://www.aoic.net/APDA/APDA1711/APDA1711CommunicationandIntimacyFactsheet.pdf>

### **Spotlight On Parkinson's Disease: Communication and Intimacy**

- <https://www.apdaparkinson.org/webinar/spotlight-parkinsons-disease-communication-intimacy/>

### **Video: Sexuality and Parkinson's Disease**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dWNjqttLnHw&t=2s>

[Daniela Wittmann, Ph.D., MSW](#) is a social certified sex therapist, she sees patients with sexual health issues at the [Michigan Medicine Center for Sexual Health](#) and in the [Department of Urology](#). Watch her YouTube video on Sexuality and Parkinson's Disease

# References

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- [Loredana Raciti](#)<sup>1</sup>, [Maria Cristina De Cola](#)<sup>2</sup>, [Paola Ortelli](#)<sup>3</sup>, [Francesco Corallo](#)<sup>4</sup>, [Viviana Lo Buono](#)<sup>5</sup>, [Elisabetta Morini](#)<sup>6</sup>, [Fabrizio Quattrini](#)<sup>3</sup>, [Serena Filoni](#)<sup>4</sup>, [Rocco Salvatore Calabrò](#)<sup>5</sup>
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