



# Let's Talk

## Parkinson's Disease: Speech and Swallowing Problems

“ I have Parkinson's and take medicine several times a day. When I get tired or feel weak, my voice gets soft and people can't understand me. My husband has a hearing loss and gets very frustrated with me. Sometimes I choke when I am drinking, and I am worried this will get worse. ”

—Catherine

### Do You Have Parkinson's Disease?

Parkinson's disease causes problems with your muscles. This includes the muscles you use for talking and eating. For example:

- You use many small muscles in your lips, tongue, and jaw to talk and chew your food.
- The muscles in your chest help you take a big breath when you talk.
- The muscles in your throat squeeze food into your stomach.

When muscles are stiff, slow, or weak, you can have problems.

### How Does It Affect My Speech?

Most people with Parkinson's tend to have similar speech problems, including:

- Soft voice
- Weak breathing
- Not much mouth movement

Speech problems that come from muscle weakness are called *dysarthria* (dis-AR-three-uh).

### How Does It Affect My Swallowing?

You use a lot of muscles to swallow, and they need to work together. When muscles are weak, you may choke or have trouble chewing. Swallowing problems are also called *dysphagia* (dis-FAY-juh).

#### Fast facts

- If you have Parkinson's disease, you may have trouble talking and swallowing.
- There are things you can do to speak and swallow better.
- Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) can help.



# Parkinson's Disease: Speech and Swallowing Problems

## Speech-Language Pathologists Can Help

Speech-language pathologists, or SLPs, work with people who have speech and swallowing problems. SLPs work in hospitals, clinics, private offices, and nursing homes, and can even come to your home.

Your SLP will talk with you about the problems you are having now. He or she will test the muscles in your mouth and ask you to say different words and sounds. The SLP may also watch you swallow food and liquids. You may be scheduled to have another test using special equipment to see how well you swallow.

Together, you will develop a plan to help you communicate and eat better.

## What Will Help My Speech?

Your SLP will show you exercises to practice, such as:

- Using a louder voice
- Taking bigger breaths
- Speaking slower

It helps to have your family members learn what you are practicing. Your SLP will also give you and your family tips about how to communicate better. These might include:

- Talking in a quiet room
- Using shorter sentences
- Giving the topic first
- Looking at the person you're talking with to make sure he or she understands you

“My SLP taught me how to make my voice louder. I thought I was talking loud enough, but now I can feel the difference. My husband came to therapy with me so he could help me practice my exercises at home. Now we communicate better without getting mad at each other. The exercises helped me with swallowing, and I am also much more careful about how I eat and drink.”

—Catherine

### Parkinson's disease can change your life. Help is available.

To learn more about speech and swallowing problems or to find an SLP near you who has been certified by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), visit [www.asha.org](http://www.asha.org) or call 800-638-8255 or TTY-301-296-5650.

My SLP's name is

\_\_\_\_\_

Appointment

\_\_\_\_\_

Compliments of  
American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA)  
and