

## Crew Health Advice: Parkinson's Disease



Parkinson's disease is rarely diagnosed in active seafarers or a cause for medical repatriation. However, Parkinson's is a neurological disorder that affects millions of people around the world. As a result, it is useful to know about Parkinson's, from what it is to how to recognise the warning signs.

## What is Parkinson's Disease?

Parkinson's disease is a disorder that affects the nervous system. It causes a loss of dopamine-producing cells in the brain, which affects movement and coordination. Symptoms can include tremors, stiffness, and difficulty with balance and coordination.

Symptoms usually begin gradually and worsen over time. As the disease progresses, people may have difficulty walking and talking. There may also be mental and behavioural changes, sleep problems, depression, memory difficulties and fatigue.

## Who is at risk for Parkinson's Disease?

While Parkinson's disease can affect anyone, some people are more at risk than others. Factors that can increase your risk include:

- Age: Parkinson's is more common in people over 60. Young adults rarely develop Parkinson's.
- Genetics: Some forms of Parkinson's are hereditary.
- Gender: Men are more likely to develop Parkinson's than women.
- Environmental factors: Exposure to certain toxins or pesticides may increase the risk of developing Parkinson's at a later stage in life.

Senior seafarers should be more aware of the symptoms of Parkinson's and take proper medical advice if they experience any of the warning signs (see below). Studies show an early onset of Parkinson's at around the age of 50 years in about 5-10% of cases, but this is mostly associated with a genetic disposition to the disease.

As a result, seafarers with Parkinson's in their family should pay further heed to any developing symptoms.

## What are the warning signs of Parkinson's Disease?

Some early symptoms may include:

- Tremors: Shaking in the hands, arms, leg or jaw.
- Stiffness: Difficulty with movement and rigidity in the limbs.
- Slow movements: Slower movements and difficulty with initiating movement.

- Impaired balance: Difficulty maintaining balance and coordination

Symptoms often begin on one side of the body or even in one limb on one side of the body. As the disease progresses, it eventually affects both sides. However, the symptoms may still be more severe on one side than the other.

If you notice any of these symptoms, it's important to speak with a medical professional as soon as possible.

## How is Parkinson's Disease treated?

While there is no cure for Parkinson's disease, there are several treatments that can help manage symptoms. Some medications can help manage the symptoms, while physical therapy can help improve movement and balance. In some cases, surgery may be recommended to alleviate symptoms.

## How can seafarers reduce their risk of Parkinson's Disease?

While there's no way to completely eliminate your risk of Parkinson's disease, there are some steps you can take to reduce your risk. These include:

- Protecting yourself from environmental toxins and pesticides. This would mean proper use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) on board the vessel, ensuring proper understanding of chemicals and compliance with the MSDS sheets when dealing with them.
- Being aware of the signs and symptoms, and seeking medical advice should they occur.
- Staying physically active to help maintain good balance and coordination.
- Eating a healthy diet that includes plenty of fruits, vegetables and whole grains.
- Getting regular check-ups with your doctor to monitor your health.

## Conclusion

Parkinson's disease is a serious condition, but with awareness and early detection, it can be managed. As a seafarer, it is important to be aware of the risks and warning signs of Parkinson's, so

you can take action if needed. Remember to take care of yourself, stay healthy and seek medical attention if you notice any symptoms of Parkinson's.

**For more information about Parkinson's disease:**

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**American Parkinson Disease Association (APDA)**

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**Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research**

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**Parkinson Alliance**

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