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Home Illnesses and conditions Brain, nerves and spinal cord Parkinson’s disease Parkinson’s disease is a condition in which parts of the brain become progressively damaged over many years. The three main symptoms of Parkinson’s disease are: A person with Parkinson’s disease can also experience a wide range of other physical and psychological symptoms, including: Read more about the symptoms of Parkinson’s disease See your GP if you’re concerned that you may have symptoms of Parkinson’s disease. Your GP will ask about the problems you’re experiencing and may refer you to a specialist for further tests. Read more about diagnosing Parkinson’s disease Parkinson’s disease is caused by a loss of nerve cells in part of the brain called the substantia nigra. This leads to a reduction in a chemical called dopamine in the brain. Dopamine plays a vital role in regulating the movement of the body. A reduction in dopamine is responsible for many of the symptoms of Parkinson’s disease. Exactly what causes the loss of nerve cells is unclear. Most experts think that a combination of genetic and environmental factors is responsible. Read more about the causes of Parkinson’s disease It’s thought around 1 in 500 people are affected by Parkinson’s disease, which means there are an estimated 127,000 people in the UK with the condition. Most people with Parkinson’s start to develop symptoms when they’re over 50, although around 1 in 20 people with the condition first experience symptoms when they’re under 40. Men are slightly more likely to get Parkinson’s disease than women. Although there’s currently no cure for Parkinson’s disease, treatments are available to help reduce the main symptoms and maintain quality of life for as long as possible. These include: You may not need any treatment during the early stages of Parkinson’s disease, as symptoms are usually mild. However, you may need regular appointments with your specialist so your condition can be monitored. Read more about treating Parkinson’s disease As the condition progresses, the symptoms of Parkinson’s disease can get worse and it can become increasingly difficult to carry out everyday activities without assistance. Many people respond well to treatment and only experience mild to moderate disability, whereas the minority may not respond as well and can, in time, become more severely disabled. Parkinson’s disease doesn’t directly cause people to die, but the condition can place great strain on the body, and can make some people more vulnerable to serious and life-threatening infections. However, with advances in treatment, most people with Parkinson’s disease now have a normal or near-normal life expectancy. Read more about living with Parkinson’s disease It may also be useful to read your guide to care and support – written for people with care and support needs, as well as their carers and relatives. The symptoms of Parkinson’s disease usually develop gradually and are mild at first. There are many different symptoms associated with Parkinson’s disease. Some of the more common symptoms are described below.