



Skin Changes



Changes in the skin are common symptoms of Parkinson's disease (PD). Many people with PD develop oily or flaky skin, especially on the face and scalp. Others have trouble with dry skin or excessive sweating. Studies have also shown an increased prevalence of melanoma skin cancer among people with PD.

Oily, Flaky or Inflamed Skin

There are tiny glands called sebaceous glands below the surface of the skin. These glands secrete an oily substance into the hair follicles. This oil normally helps protect the skin, but too much can cause problems referred to as seborrheic dermatitis.

Signs of Sebaceous Dermatitis

- Oily skin, especially on the forehead, sides of the nose, scalp and eyebrows
- Skin scales that are white and flaky or yellowish and oily
- Itching
- Redness
- Chronically inflamed areas

What You Can Do

- Wash skin twice a day with warm water and rinse with cold water
- Use a neutral soap like unscented glycerin soap
- For dandruff, try an over-the-counter shampoo containing selenium, selenium sulfide, salicylic acid, zinc or coal tar
- In severe cases, doctors can prescribe shampoos or lotions containing selenium, ketoconazole or corticosteroids

Dry Skin

Extreme dryness of the skin also can be a problem for people with PD.

If you are experiencing dry skin, you should:

- Use skin moisturizers and hair conditioners

- Consult a dermatologist

Excessive Sweating

Many people with PD experience trouble with too much sweating. Sometimes this occurs on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet. Drenching sweats, particularly at night, can also be troublesome. Excessive sweating is often a “wearing off” symptom for people who experience fluctuations in the effectiveness of their carbidopa-levodopa (Sinemet®).

Tips for Excessive Sweating

- Ask your doctor about adjusting your carbidopa-levodopa (Sinemet®) dose.
- Take lukewarm showers
- Wear lightweight cotton clothes in warm weather
- Drink lots of water and other liquids
- In severe cases, for drenching sweats, your doctor may prescribe oral medications
- For the palms and the feet, your doctor may prescribe topical medications

Too Little Sweating

Some people with PD perspire too little. This can be related to the disease itself, or it can be a side effect of anticholinergic medications (such as trihexyphenidyl and bztropine for PD; or certain antidepressants, sleep or allergy medications). Sweating is important because it is the body's natural mechanism for cooling. If you exercise or live in a warm climate, this is especially important.

If you experience too little sweating, decreasing the dose of anticholinergic medications — always under the supervision of your doctor — may help.

Skin Cancer

[Skin cancer](#) is relatively common in the general population and in people with PD. Of all skin cancers, people with Parkinson's should be extra-careful regarding melanoma. Melanomas are more likely to spread from the skin to internal organs than any other skin cancers.

Studies have suggested the likelihood of developing malignant melanoma is two to seven times higher in people with PD than the general population. While melanomas are relatively rare (even in people with PD), early diagnosis and treatment is important. People with Parkinson's should get screened by a dermatologist annually.

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Parkinson's Foundation Helpline

Contact 1-800-4PD-INFO or Helpline@Parkinson.org for answers to your Parkinson's questions.

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