

Does Parkinson's run in families? Can you be tested for familial Parkinson's?

This is a very common question asked of the staff at Parkinson's Victoria, and unfortunately it has a very complex and inconclusive answer.

Parkinson's is largely thought to be an **Idiopathic illness**. This means it occurs spontaneously with no distinct family history.

However, in some rare instances it does appear to run in families. It is thought that between 2 – 5 % of people diagnosed with Parkinson's may have a genetic link to developing the illness. There has been much research across the globe exploring familial links in relation to Parkinson's, and researchers have found several different forms of genetic mutation that may relate to the disease.

Some of these mutations appear to be seen in certain ethnic groups and often have a very distinct presentation. *If* there is a distinct family history – where Parkinson's is seen in several people across several generations in your family – your neurologist may talk to you about undergoing a genetic screening for Parkinson's [see below].

If your Neurologist is at all concerned about a familial link to Parkinson's they will refer you to a specialist Neuro-genetics clinic for further consultation and to receive genetic counselling. (Counselling will help individuals in the decision making process, explain the procedure, the potential outcomes and provide general support).

It is important to remember however, that familial Parkinson's is extremely rare. It is also treatable in the same way that we treat Idiopathic Parkinson's, in other words with medication that treats the symptoms only.

In Australia, there are currently no conclusive genetic screening tests available to diagnose familial Parkinson's. If your neurologist suggests a gene test, the blood sample will be sent overseas for analysis.

In endeavoring to learn more about the genetic make-up of people with Parkinson's, the Parkinson's Victoria Research Register is taking some genetic material (in the saliva cells) from research participants. This research project may in time assist in developing a conclusive test for Parkinson's.

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To see the complete newsletter, click here:

www.parkinsonsvic.org.au/about-ps/publications.htm#signposts

For more information about Parkinson's and genetics, or if you have any question in relation to Parkinson's, please contact Parkinson's Victoria.