

*As summer comes around again, most of us think warmer weather, Christmas and maybe even a holiday. But, "surviving the silly season" when you have Parkinson's can create a whole different ball game. Parkinson's Nurse Specialist, VICTOR MCCONVEY offers some timely information to help you make the most of the holidays.*

### **Surviving Christmas**

For most people, Christmas is a time when we eat too much, drink too much and don't exercise as much as we should! Typically, much of the food we consume during the festive season is very high in fat and protein. For people living with Parkinson's though, it is important to remember that taking Dopamine based medication (such as Sinamet™ Madopar™ Kinson™ and Stalevo™) close to a meal that is high in fat or protein may cause the medication to have a reduced effect.

Dopamine uses the same "carriers" as protein to cross the intestinal wall and blood brain barrier, so competition for these "carriers" will delay or reduce the medication's effect. Meals that are high in fat may also delay medication absorption, as they take longer to digest. All this may leave you feeling sluggish, fatigued, or suffering from "wearing off".

Trying to take your medication away from meal times is a good strategy, however, if this causes nausea (which often occurs), try taking it with a small amount of food. If the nausea associated with medication is persistent, talk to your Neurologist, who may recommend Motilium™ tablets, which are the only safe anti-sick drug when you have Parkinson's.

### **Summer heat and Parkinson's**

Unlike some other neurological conditions, Parkinson's is not significantly affected by extremes of heat or cold, although many people report that their symptoms worsen a little on very hot or cold days.

During the summer months, as the ambient temperature increases, we all perspire a little more. With persistent heat, it's easy to become chronically dehydrated. To compensate for this, it's a good idea to increase your fluid intake. If you find increasing your fluids also increases your trips to the toilet, consider drinking more fluid with your medication so that these trips occur when you're "on."

Chronic dehydration may make medication less predictable (this may be related to a reduction in the amount of dopamine that can cross the blood brain barrier and may cause reduced effect of medication or earlier wearing off).

Dehydration will also worsen constipation, increase urinary concentration (heightening risk of urinary tract infection), cause dry skin (increasing skin irritation) and contribute to headaches.

To help prevent this, as the temperature rises, so should your fluid intake.

Keeping cool and out of the sun will also help reduce dehydration.

When you have Parkinson's, you need to exercise some precautions when exposed to the sun.

Medications containing Dopamine (such as Sinamet™, Madopar™, Kinson™ and Stalevo™) are known to activate malignant melanoma, which is a serious skin cancer. Exposure to the sun also increases the risk of developing this cancer.

You should also monitor any skin lesions that you have, and an annual skin check with your local doctor may be a consideration.

### **Travelling with medication**

Having Parkinson's does not have to stop you from having holidays, however if you are having a summer holiday away from home, it's best to plan ahead.

Discuss your holiday plans with your GP or Neurologist, who can provide you with a letter explaining your Parkinson's and its treatment. This can prove invaluable in the event that you need to seek medical attention while away.

If you are heading overseas or to a remote destination, it may be difficult to access a pharmacy, so always travel with a good supply of medication. Australian prescriptions will not be able to be filled at an international destination, and while you will be able to obtain most Parkinson's medications overseas, this will require a visit to a local doctor (and you will have to pay the full price for the medications).

Never check your medication with your luggage, always keep it with you while in transit and it's also a good idea to keep your prescriptions with you as well; it's a good insurance policy should your bags be lost or delayed.

## Storage of drugs

Exposing your medications to extreme heat may reduce their effectiveness, so they're best stored in a cool, dry place. If you are out and about and can't do this, just take a small supply of medication with you.

## Long Distance Travel

Travelling across multiple time zones has the potential to throw your medication timing into disarray. While there is no hard and fast rule to follow, planning ahead generally works. Plan your sleep or rest times before hand, so you know when to take less medication.

Here's an example of what one person finds successful when flying from Melbourne to London (via Singapore):

- Melbourne to Singapore

Flight departs: 2:30PM, arriving Singapore at 8PM

Take medication as normal, but add in an extra dose to accommodate for the time difference in Singapore and to ensure you're able embark on the second leg of the journey.

- Singapore to London

Flight departs 11:30PM, arriving London 5:30AM

Consider this as "night time", and take the first dose of your medication as the cabin crew serves breakfast.

Be prepared to take an extra dose once you arrive at your destination as sometimes there are delays at the airport, and the excitement of arrival and disrupted sleep can cause earlier wearing off than normal.

How you manage long haul travel will depend on the symptoms you experience, and you can discuss planning your journey with your Neurologist or the staff at Parkinson's Victoria.

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**[www.parkinsonsvic.org.au/about-ps/publications.htm#signposts](http://www.parkinsonsvic.org.au/about-ps/publications.htm#signposts)**

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