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Parkinson's Disease Symptoms

I done wrassled with an alligator. Tussled with a whale. I done handcuffed lightening, threw thunder in jail. I murdered a stone, I hospitalised a brick, I'm so mean I make medicine sick.

- *Muhammad Ali*

History's most famous athlete was as nimble with word play as he was fleet of foot. He dazzled opponents and global audiences alike with his athleticism in the ring and his unflappable verbosity outside of it.

Gradually these trademark characteristics began to fade. His lightening reflexes slowed. His speech became impaired. His mind was still sharp, but his rhymes failed to dance off his tongue as readily as they once had. Over the years his body co-operated with his mind less and less. Explosive footwork slowed to a deliberate shuffle. A flight of stairs or a car door became as daunting a physical challenge as 15 rounds with Joe Frazier. The famous Mississippi Mouth became barely audible. Ali had fallen victim to a merciless, cruel opponent- Parkinson's disease.

Parkinson's disease attacks the central nervous system, reducing the brain's ability to co-ordinate movement. The brain does its best to give instructions but the message gets lost in translation. This results in unimaginable frustration for the sufferer and ultimately renders the individual a prisoner in his or her own body.

SYMPTOMS

Tremors- the most noticeable early symptom. It often begins very localised, such as in a finger of one hand. Over time it spreads throughout the whole arm. Tremors often occur when the limb is at rest or when held in a stiff, unsupported position. Tremors also may occur in the lips, feet or tongue.

Bradykinesia- slowness of motion. The individual's movements become increasingly slow and over time muscles may randomly "freeze".

Akinesia- muscle rigidity. Often begins in the legs and neck. These muscles become very stiff. When it affects the muscles of the face the individual adopts a mask like stare.

Digestion problems- the ability to process food slows down, resulting in low energy and constipation.

Depression- Parkinson's causes chemical changes in the brain that may result in depression. This can be an early warning sign, but as depression becomes more common in older adults, it is not often associated with the disease.

Low Blood Pressure- can result in light headedness and fainting.

Temperature sensitivity- perception of temperature can be affected, and may result in hot flashes and excessive sweating.

Leg discomfort- some patients report burning sensations and cramp in the legs.

Balance- There is a progressive loss of coordination and sense of balance, putting the individual at risk of falls.

Over time, Parkinson's sufferers take on similar external characteristics. There is the continual tremor, the stooped posture, the slow shuffle and the blank stare. At the present time there is no cure and it is not completely understood as to what causes the disease. However, it is manageable through medication and lifestyle, especially when identified in the early stages. As Ali himself so famously proved, just because an opponent has you against the ropes, it doesn't mean the fight is over.