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Your relationship with your loved one

As your loved one's condition changes, so will your relationship. Here's some advice to help you manage this change.

All relationships and friendships change and evolve, and this is particularly true when someone who is close to you has a lifelong condition such as Parkinson's disease.

Yet despite their symptoms, your partner, family member or friend are still the person you knew before they had Parkinson's.

That doesn't mean you may not feel a sense of loss or sadness as you watch their condition progress.³ These feelings are a normal part of caring.

Your relationship – how it may change

As the symptoms become more intrusive, your relationship with your loved one may move further away from being a partnership to one built around their reliance on you.³ However if the person with Parkinson's has recently moved on to a new treatment, it could be that some of their symptoms will have improved.⁴

People with Parkinson's disease tend to find their loss of independence particularly difficult, so this new phase of treatment could be an opportunity for them to recapture some of that independence. It may also provide you with some respite and the chance to do a few more things both separately and together on a social level.

If the person you care for is your spouse, consider having conversations around sex and intimacy, discuss how you can maintain your physical relationship. Discuss with your partner how you could adapt your physical relations so both of you can enjoy being intimate, but be mindful you may not be able to have sex as often or the way that you used to.

Your loved one may experience sexual dysfunction which can impact their self-esteem. Make sure to reassure them and to talk about it openly and in a light way.

Communicating

'Make the most of the time you have together and take the opportunity to make new memories, while at the same time treasuring old ones', says Health Psychology Specialist Clare Moloney.

Try and adapt the way you interact to make up for any difficulties the symptoms might be causing. For instance, if your loved one is a family member and they are having trouble hugging you, then make a point of being the one to hug them.

Maintaining some intimacy can be reassuring for you both.

If it is a friend that you care for, keep the lines of communication clear as you both adapt to different ways of caring.

For example, take the time to involve and discuss why you are changing the way you do something. This can also help to reassure them and avoid confusion.

'Your loved one isn't defined by their disease. Try to keep your conversations light and humorous, not always talking about Parkinson's', says Clare.

References:

- 3 M. G. Baker, and L. Graham, 'The Journey: Parkinson's Disease', *BMJ*, 329 (2004), 611-4.
- 4 European Parkinson's Disease Association/AbbVie, 'Advanced Parkinson's Pathfinder', (2013).