



One LOVE

Dating & Relationships with Parkinson's

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Young and bold or older and wiser, none of us are immune to the awkwardness that is dating. From wondering if you are reading the signals right, to finding the courage to put yourself out there, and decide that now is the time to ask the special someone out for a date. Then there are the “what ifs”. What if they don’t like me? What if they don’t like dogs? What if I say something silly? What if I never find someone? Add Parkinson disease into the mix and the what ifs can get out of control. What if? What if? What if?

What ifs...we all have them, (or have had them) especially when it comes to dating. Possessing the vulnerability required to approach someone or go out on that first date is not for the faint of heart!

Vulnerable feelings stem from your core belief about who you are, what you want, your self-worth, health concerns, and even prior dating/ relationship experience. Being vulnerable can be very scary. Now I have a new what if to consider. What if I’m scared, but I try anyway?

Let us not be thwarted by fear or regret, but let us shoot beyond mere stars, let us bask in all the splendor with unapologetic enthusiasm.

In this article we will explore conversations around dating/relationships and Parkinson’s. Dating can be an exhilarating experience. Once the ice is broken,

you’ve made the initial connection, dating is exciting and something to look forward to. Or is it? Introduce Parkinson’s and the entire outlook can feel very different, like your life is somehow unmoored because of a Parkinson’s diagnosis.

Let’s look at a few questions people struggle with before embracing the moment and entering the dating/relationship world.

What would I say if my date notices I have a slight tremor, but I’m not ready to disclose I have PD?

Conversations around Parkinson’s start with your personal boundaries. As an emotionally healthy, mature, autonomous individual, it is not your responsibility to meet someone else’s expectations. Although over time the requirements of a relationship will change, remember in this conversation we are talking about meeting and dating someone new. You do not have a responsibility to disclose every aspect of yourself to someone with whom you’ve just met, you have not established trust, or even friendship. Let’s look a little further.

When we force ourselves to be transparent before our personal readiness, we may be engaging in “people pleasing behaviours”. This means we ignore our base

instinct to protect ourselves and keep ourselves safe; it's self-sacrificial; learned patterns of behaviour. You make yourself boundlessly available and demonstrate pleasing interactions because you want this person to like and accept you. These feelings/patterns are learned, unfortunately positive outcomes when we are self-sacrificial in new relationships are rare. An imbalance of power is created. Remember, we teach people how to treat us in how we respond to things, whether in our best interest or not.

Another possibility is you might disclose before your personal readiness as a way of unconsciously sabotaging the potential for something more. People will sometimes make shocking statements or over share personal details as a way of proving to yourself that, in this case, having PD means the end of all dating, no hope of finding love or companionship. That response mechanism comes from fear. Fear of rejection, fear of judgment, abandonment and so forth. In this scenario, I would suggest reaching out to a professional that can help you create boundaries that create safety for you as you navigate healthy beginnings in your dating activities. Knowledge is power.

When is the right time to tell the person I date, that I have PD?

I believe this to be a pinnacle question, with a clear and linear answer. The answer is: when you feel that the relationship has reached a place that feels safe, and you feel you can trust this person to fairly and thoughtfully weigh the information set before them. It's fair to take your time, establish trust and then share details about living with PD. It is equally fair for your person to take their time in processing this information; any relationship requires both people understanding the commitment they are making. These conversations may feel difficult and scary. I suggest undertaking them when and only when you trust this person will demonstrate integrity and kindness in everything you share.

Is it all right not to disclose I have PD? Asking for a Friend

A successful relationship is built on trust, love, and respect. Part of the responsibility we have is to respect our person enough to give them the tools they need in making informed decisions for themselves. Engaging in a serious monogamous relationship,

not casually dating, but a meaningful relationship, and not disclosing you live with PD is not likely to end well. Your partner will eventually find out, and now you have trust issues; secret keeping. This type of secret is often experienced as a betrayal. This is a slippery slope fraught with poor outcomes. Another thing to consider, as the secret keeper how will you feel knowing this secret is yet undiscovered. Will you be the best version of yourself living with this secret? How would you feel if it was your partner who kept secrets/important information from you?

The same principle applies to friends and family of your new partner. Together you will fine tune the inner workings of your relationship and discuss your feelings about sharing PD with friends and family. Guided by your feelings, this is your body your condition. You guide your partner in the way that is the most comfortable for you. A loving and respectful partner will hold space for that.

Can I still have children with young onset Parkinson's?

This is an important conversation especially for those with young onset PD. From a physical perspective, women with Parkinson's have not been identified as having issues with fertility, conception, and birthing. Studies have indicated that having Parkinson's should not exclusively determine the delivery method (vaginal birth vs cesarian section) and that birthing under the support of a qualified medical professional is safe. Considerations about medication, contraindications, or other risk factors would be identified individually by your treating medical practitioner, not unlike a woman without Parkinson's.

Decisions around childbirth should be made with your partner and your medical health professional. Men with young onset PD may also be able to conceive naturally depending on symptoms; even where there is erectile dysfunction. Medications maybe discussed with your medical professional to assist you with functional issues.

The success of your relationship will be determined by the extent to which both parties' needs are served. Always turn towards each other in times of uncertainty. Turning towards your partner reassures them you are present and committed. We need to be intentional when building these connections. Those are the relationships that transcend all other things.