

Conditions Treated by Neurologists

A neurologist studies all areas of neurology and can treat hundreds of conditions -- anything from A-Z and the kitchen sink thrown in for good measure. Some sources estimate 400-600+ specific types of neurological disorders. Here are just a few you may be familiar with.

- Alzheimer's disease
- Brain & Spinal Cord Injury
- Dystonia & Essential Tremor
- Meningitis
- Muscular Dystrophy
- Spasticity
- Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS)
- Cerebral Palsy
- Encephalitis
- Migraines & Severe Headaches
- Neuropathy
- Stroke
- Aneurysms
- Concussions
- Epilepsy & Seizures
- Multiple Sclerosis
- Parkinson disease
- Tumors of the brain or spinal cord

KNOW YOUR NEURO

A Guide to Neurologists and Parkinson's

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According to google, the definition of neurologist is "a medical doctor that specializes in the diagnosis and treatment of disorders and injuries of the nervous system which can include the brain, the spinal cord and nerves." This seems like a broad definition but also doesn't really give any details. In this article we'll try and break it down for you.

What is the Nervous System?

The nervous system is the body's central command center – it includes the brain, spinal cord, and all peripheral nerves throughout the body. It controls everything you think, feel and do! From thinking about moving your arm to making your arm move, from multi-tasking like walking and talking to remembering to be cautious when walking on ice. When a person stops to think about that whole process, it is astounding to consider all the details a neurologist must know and how much knowledge they have.

Education and Training to Become a Neurologist

To become a neurologist, a person must first have obtained an undergraduate degree. They then apply to a university's faculty of medicine and complete another 4-5 years to obtain a medical degree. This is followed by additional medical schooling called residency which can be three additional years of specific neurology or might be a combination of neurology and internal medicine. After completing residency, the next step is to apply to the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons where they must complete an exam. Only after passing the exam do

they then qualify for a license to practice medicine.

Eleven years minimum, that's a lot of commitment and dedication! But WAIT...there's more!

Becoming a Movement Disorder Specialist/Neurologist

If a neurologist wants to become a Movement Disorders Specialist, they must go back to school for additional training called a fellowship. Fellowship is a minimum of an additional two years specifically studying movement disorders. Parkinson disease and Atypical Parkinsonism are not the only movement disorders, though they are inevitably more familiar, especially to those reading this. Movement disorders also include Huntington disease, Dystonia, Essential tremor, Ataxia, Wilson disease, and Tourette syndrome. A Movement Disorder Specialist will specialize in diagnosing and treating these specific types of conditions. They may also be employed by universities to teach and do investigative research.

Growing Demand and Limited Availability

As our population grows and ages, the number of people needing specialized medical attention increases; unfortunately, the number of Neurologists and Movement Disorder Specialists is not increasing as fast as the demand for service. (Remember the 11-13 years it takes to get here?!)

As you may be able to imagine, because of the specialized nature of neurologists they are not available in every community and are often concentrated in larger centres. And the more specialized a neurologist is (ie a Movement Disorders Specialist) the fewer there will be. In both cases there will inevitably be long wait times and travel if you live outside a major centre (though telehealth portals have helped with some travel aspects).

The Referral Process

Potential patients cannot just call a community or Movement Disorder Neurologist to request or book an appointment; your family doctor or nurse practitioner must submit a referral to the appropriate access and triage point (think of it like a regional health care queue). The referral letter may be asking for the neurologist to take you on as a patient, for a confirmation of diagnosis, or asking for assistance in managing Parkinson disease. Once the referral is received, the request will be triaged. Wait time from referral to being seen by a neurologist can vary, but it is not uncommon to have to wait between 9-18 months.

How Can They Help

Both Community or Movement Disorder Neurologists help to manage and treat Parkinson disease by diagnosing it and creating a treatment plans. This often (but not always) begins with prescribing and adjusting medications that work to improve symptoms such as tremor, stiffness, slowness, and changes

with movement. Because Parkinson disease changes slowly over time, the neurologist will continue to monitor symptoms and make changes to the treatment plan when needed. They may also recommend other supports such as physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, and regular exercise, all of which can help maintain independence and quality of life.

A Movement Disorder Neurologist is also the one to assess and manage treatment options such as Deep Brain Stimulation or Duodopa. They may also take on or assist Community Neurologists or General Practitioners with more complex Parkinson's patients.

In conclusion Community and Movement Disorder Neurologists play an key role in the care of people living with Parkinson disease and Atypical Parkinsonism. Their expertise provides important guidance in diagnosis, treatment, and long-term management. Working alongside other health care providers, they help ensure that individuals receive specialized care and support. ■

