

Speech and communication changes reported
by persons with Parkinson's disease
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Parkinson's disease, PD, is one of the most common neurodegenerative disorders affecting up to 1 % of the population over 65 years of age and as many as 3 % over age 80. Reduced loudness, hoarse, breathy voice quality and imprecise articulation are commonly described as frequent speech symptoms, whereas self-reported information about the communication disorder is more limited. This study includes information from 188 people with PD who responded to a questionnaire about self-perceived speech and communication difficulties, strategies to overcome communication problems and services received. Respondents were recruited via the National Parkinson's Disease Association. The questionnaire was partly based on a questionnaire from 1994 to allow comparisons. The questionnaire could be accessed via a web-link or in paper-format using regular mail (with a paid reply envelop enclosed). Closed response alternatives were used, but free text could be added.

Respondents mean age was 68 years, 56 % were male and 44 % female. Mean disease duration was 7 years. Sixty-six percent reported no other illness than PD.

The three most commonly reported symptoms were fatigue, worsening of speech function and worsening of leg mobility. Weak voice, word-finding difficulties and imprecise articulation were the most common changes related to communication. Information about situations that affect speech and communication negatively and emotional reactions to communication difficulties were reported as well as information on impact on communicative participation and strategies to improve communication. Finally, 45 % of respondents had seen a speech and language pathologist, SLP, and information about the type of intervention and how it was perceived was acquired. Prevalence of speech symptoms was comparable to previous studies, whereas symptoms such as word-finding difficulties also were highlighted in the present study. Access to SLP-services had increased compared to previous studies.