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Parkinson's drug breakthrough



Parkinson's disease is associated with muscle tremor

Patients with Parkinson's disease have been shown to benefit from taking a new form of drug treatment.

Researchers from the Parkinson Study Group (PSG), a joint US and Canadian organisation, compared the effect of the new drug, Mirapex with that of a more traditional drug treatment, levodopa.

They found that during the first two years just 28% of patients who took Mirapex developed motor complications compared with 51% of patients who took levodopa.

Starting treatment with mirapex also appeared to delay the onset of motor complications.

After two years, 72% of patients treated with Mirapex were completely free from motor complications.

Parkinson's disease affects approximately 1% of people aged 60 and over, though it can strike younger people.

The nature and severity of symptoms, which include tremor, muscle rigidity, slowed motion, shuffling gait and loss of facial expression, vary from patient to patient.

“
Many patients may be able to remain in their jobs longer, and allow them to continue to carry on daily activities that we often take for granted
”

Mary Baker,
European Parkinson's Disease Association

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Levodopa has been available for the last 30 years and is typically the medication most often prescribed.

Over time the effect of levodopa may become shorter and fluctuations in the motor symptoms appear during the day leading to dose increases or more frequent administrations.

This is also accompanied by the occurrence of dyskinesias - involuntary movements resulting in fragmented or jerky motions.

After five years of levodopa treatment, 50-75% of patients develop motor complications.

The traditional approach has been to start patients on levodopa and as the disease progresses, to add additional therapies.

Study details

The research focused on 301 patients in the early stages of Parkinson's disease.

During the first ten weeks of their treatment each was either given Mirapex or levodopa at the maximum tolerated dose.

From then the Mirapex patients continued to take a fixed dose of the drug, while levodopa was given to all patients in differing doses depending on their symptoms.

The researchers found that the impact of the drugs was less likely to wear off among the Mirapex patients.

Dyskinesias developed in 31% of the levodopa patients, but only 10% of the Mirapex patients.

The European Parkinson's Disease Association (EPDA) welcomed the findings.

Mary Baker, EPDA president, said: "The most positive finding from the study is that a treatment has been shown to reduce the risk of dyskinesias which can destroy the quality of life of many patients with Parkinson's disease ."

"In addition, some patients may be able to delay the inevitable use of levodopa, which does have an important role to play in treatment but also carries the risk of dyskinesias in the longer term.

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"Many patients may be able to remain in their jobs longer, and allow them to continue to carry on daily activities that we often take for granted".

The research is published in the Journal of the American Medical Association.

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