![AbilityNet]

AbilityNet Factsheet March 2021

Parkinson's and Technology

1. What is Parkinson's

There are around 145,000 people living with Parkinson's in the UK. Parkinson's is a progressive neurological condition where nerve cells in the brain responsible for producing a chemical called dopamine start to die. Dopamine allows messages to be sent to the parts of the brain that co-ordinate movement. As the body's dopamine levels decrease, these parts of the brain are unable to work normally, causing symptoms of Parkinson's to appear, including a loss of movement and balance.
The three main symptoms of Parkinson's are tremor (shaking), rigidity (muscle stiffness) and slowness of movement (bradykinesia). But people may also experience other symptoms including problems with sleep, memory and mental health issues.

2. How can technology help people with Parkinson's

Technological devices and equipment, including computers, tablets and smartphones, offer many benefits to people with Parkinson's.

Adjust existing settings

You can adjust settings to make standard equipment such as a computer or a laptop easier to use for someone with Parkinson's. For example, you can:

• Adjust keyboards to reduce the chance of hitting multiple keys while you type.
• Slow down your mouse so it is easier to control. You can also make the pointer more visible on-screen.
• For those who find it hard to click the mouse, you can slow down the double-click speed. There is also software available that can automate clicks.
• You can adjust many newer touchscreen devices so that the screen is less sensitive. These devices require you to hold your finger on the screen before you get a response from them. These devices may also have built-in technology to help you if you find "tapping" to launch apps difficult, or your device is picking up involuntary taps.
For details of more adjustments on smartphones, tablets, laptops and computers go to My Computer My Way

Alternative input methods for people with Parkinson's

- Where adjustments aren't enough to make things easier, you can invest in an alternative input device such as a keyboard or mouse.
- Alternatively, where it's difficult to use your hands and arms you can use voice control technology. Most devices now have this built-in.

Assistive technology

- Smart home devices, such as Amazon's Alexa or Google Home, can control the home environment. You can set these up so you're able to control lights, heating and many more devices using your voice.

Software support

Speech-to-text (dictation) software offers a rapid means of getting ideas onto the page, often much faster than typing, and is a good way to reduce typos. It can also offer an alternative method of controlling your device.

Word prediction software enables you to reduce the amount you need to type. With this software, you type the first few characters of a word, and it will offer you a number of suggestions. Most smartphones will do this by default.

If you have a tablet or smartphone device, there are several apps and "reminder" apps, available to help you organise your daily needs and tasks more effectively. For example, if you have issues with communicating your needs, there are several packages that can "give you" a voice. You can use these packages to store phrases that you use on a regular basis and access them quickly whenever you need them. For example,

- Speech therapy apps that may be able to offer you some support with communication difficulties.
- There are also some useful apps that can help with mindfulness and stress relief if you are experiencing anxiety.

3. Useful contacts for people with Parkinson's

- Parkinson's UK: www.parkinsons.org.uk
- NHS Health A-Z: www.nhs.uk/conditions/parkinsons-disease/

4. How AbilityNet can help you

My Computer My Way

My Computer My Way is an AbilityNet run website packed with articles explaining how to use the accessibility features built into your computer, tablet or smartphone. The site is routinely updated as new features and changes are made to the Windows, MacOS, iOS, Chrome OS and Android operating systems. The site is broken down into the following sections:

- **Vision** – computer adjustments to do with vision and colour
- **Hearing** – computer adjustments to do with hearing, communication and speech
- **Motor** – computer adjustments to do mobility, stamina and dexterity
- **Cognitive** – computer adjustments to do with attention, learning and memory

Use it for free at **mcmw.abilitynet.org.uk**

Advice and information

If you have any questions please contact us at AbilityNet and we will do all we can to help.

- Telephone: 0800 048 7642
- Email: **enquiries@abilitynet.org.uk**

IT support at Home
If you're looking for in-person support, you can book a free visit from one of our disclosure-checked volunteers. Many of our volunteers are former IT professionals who give their time to help older people and people with disabilities to use technology to achieve their goals. Our friendly volunteers can help with most major computer systems, laptops, tablet devices and smartphones.
https://abilitynet.org.uk/at-home

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