

# Neurodegenerative conditions

Neurodegenerative diseases occur when nerve cells in the brain or peripheral nervous system lose function over time and ultimately die. Although treatments may help relieve some of the physical or mental symptoms associated with neurodegenerative diseases, there is currently no way to slow disease progression and no known cures.

Neurodegenerative diseases affect millions of people worldwide. Parkinson's disease is one of the most common neurodegenerative diseases and in 2020 it was estimated that 145,000 people were living with the condition in the UK.

In this guide we are going to provide information on Parkinson's disease and Motor Neurone Disease. Information regarding dementia can be found in a separate guide.



# Parkinson's disease

A person with Parkinson's disease will experience a wide range of physical and psychological symptoms, but the main three symptoms of Parkinson's disease are:

- involuntary shaking of particular parts of the body/tremors
- slow movement
- stiff and inflexible muscles

## Other symptoms include:

- **depression** and **anxiety**
- balance problems
- loss of sense of smell
- problems sleeping
- memory problems

If you or a family member are concerned that you may have symptoms of Parkinson's disease contact your GP. For more details of diagnosing Parkinson's disease click [here](#).

Although there's currently no cure for Parkinson's disease, treatments are available to help reduce the main symptoms and maintain quality of life for as long as possible.

## These include:

- supportive treatments, such as **physiotherapy** and **occupational therapy**
- medication
- in some cases, brain surgery

As the condition progresses, the symptoms of Parkinson's disease can get worse and it can become increasingly difficult to carry out everyday activities without help. Many people respond well to treatment and only experience mild to moderate disability.

Parkinson's disease does not directly cause people to die, but the condition can place great strain on the body, and can make some people more vulnerable to serious and life-threatening infections.



But with advances in treatment, most people with Parkinson's disease now have a normal or near-normal life expectancy. To read more about living with Parkinson's disease click [here](#).

**Parkinson's UK** is the main Parkinson's support and research charity in the UK. They can help if you're living with the disease and let you know about support groups in your local area.

You can contact them by either calling their free helpline on **0808 800 0303** (Monday to Friday, 9am to 7pm, and 10am to 2pm on Saturdays) or emailing [hello@parkinsons.org.uk](mailto:hello@parkinsons.org.uk)



## Motor Neurone Disease (MND)

Motor neurone disease (MND) describes a group of diseases that affect the nerves (motor neurones) in the brain and spinal cord that tell your muscles what to do. It is a rare condition that mainly affects people in their 60s and 70s.

The symptoms of MND happen gradually and may not be obvious at first and include:

- **weakness in your ankle or leg – you might trip, or find it harder to climb stairs**
- **slurred speech, which may develop into difficulty swallowing some foods**
- **a weak grip – you might drop things, or find it hard to open jars or do up buttons**
- **muscle cramps and twitches**
- **weight loss – your arms or leg muscles may have become thinner over time**
- **difficulty stopping yourself from crying or laughing in inappropriate situations**

You should see a GP if you have possible early symptoms of motor neurone disease, such as muscle weakness. It's unlikely you have motor neurone disease, but getting a correct diagnosis as early as possible can help you get the care and support you need. You should also see a GP if a close relative has motor neurone disease or frontotemporal dementia and you're worried you may be at risk of it.

It can be difficult to diagnose motor neurone disease in the early stages and there is no single test for it and several conditions cause similar symptoms. To help rule out other conditions, a neurologist may arrange for blood tests, a scan of your brain and spine, tests to measure the electrical activity in your muscles and nerves and/or a **lumbar puncture** (spinal tap).

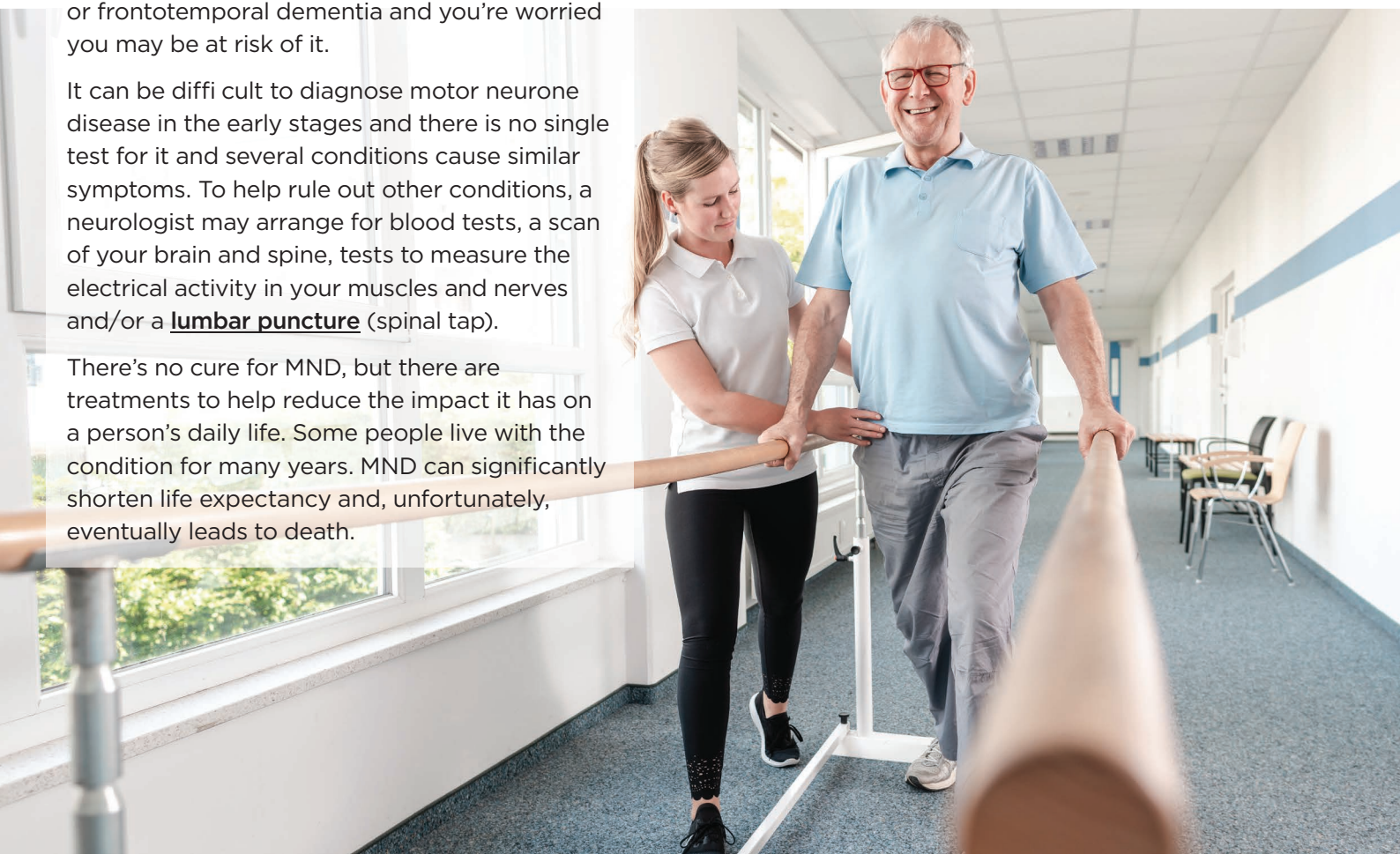
There's no cure for MND, but there are treatments to help reduce the impact it has on a person's daily life. Some people live with the condition for many years. MND can significantly shorten life expectancy and, unfortunately, eventually leads to death.



Treatment can help reduce the impact the symptoms have on your life and these include:

- **highly specialised clinics, typically involving a specialist nurse and occupational therapy to help make everyday tasks easier**
- **physiotherapy and exercises to maintain strength and reduce stiffness**
- **advice from a speech and language therapist**
- **advice from a dietitian about diet and eating**
- **a medicine called riluzole that can slightly slow down the progression of the condition**
- **medicines to relieve muscle stiffness and help with saliva problems**
- **Emotional support for you and your carer**

Motor neurone disease gets gradually worse over time. Moving around, swallowing and breathing get increasingly difficult, and treatments like a feeding tube or breathing air through a face mask may be needed.





Having MND can be very challenging for you, your friends and your family. Speak to a GP or your care team if you're struggling to cope and need more support. You may also find it useful to read more information and advice from the Motor Neurone Disease Association at [www.mndassociation.org](http://www.mndassociation.org)

### Police Mutual Services

Our Care Line Service provided by Health Assured can offer advice and information, helping with a range of concerns including emotional support. Take a look at the e-portal or download the APP.

### Health & Wellbeing e-portal

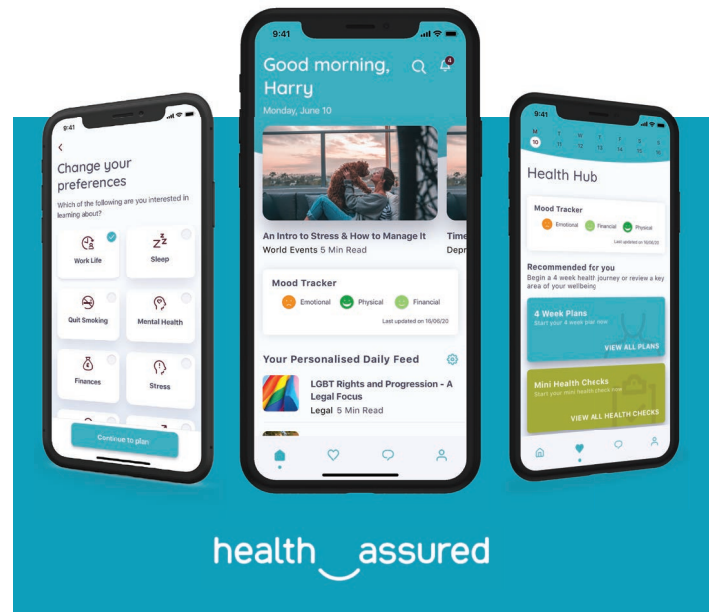
<https://healthassuredeap.co.uk>

**Username:** policemutual **Password:** careline

We've teamed up with **PayPlan**, one of the UK's leading free debt advice providers, who offer free and confidential advice to anyone in serious financial difficulties.

They're able to advise you on a range of debt solutions suited to your individual circumstances, helping to protect you and your family with a sustainable way to manage your debt.

Get free and confidential help to combat your debt, call **PayPlan** on **0800 197 8433**.



Download the **Health Assured App** and register today - your code is **MHA107477**

**Police Mutual offer a range of wellbeing support services, for more details check out the wellbeing pages on our website: [www.policemutual.co.uk](http://www.policemutual.co.uk)**

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