

# On the Benefits of Having Parkinson's Disease

Bob Harris ♦ September 12, 2016

If you've just been diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease, you might be thinking that your life has screeched around the bad-to-worse corner. The fact is, having Parkinson's actually provides several benefits. Here are some of the ones I've been experiencing.

**1. Handwriting benefits.** Okay, I admit I got a D in handwriting in sixth grade, but at least I've usually been able to read most of what I have written (except for those notes scribbled in the middle of the night on my bedside pad). But now, as is common among Parkies, my bad handwriting has also become nearly microscopic. I must take off my reading glasses in order to make it out, and even then, I'm lucky if I can read fifty percent of what I've written. The good news is that I'm saving paper: a single sheet of paper lasts all day!

Additionally, seeing a page filled with one-quarter-size handwriting is actually quite impressive. It creates the appearance of saying something wise or intelligent. That appearance must come from our life experience. We see little children writing great big letters as they develop their muscles and the hand-eye coordination. Gradually, their writing gets smaller. Graduate students no doubt have quite small writing, the more intelligent among them, the smaller the writing. If you look at my handwriting, I must be a genius if writing size is the indicator.

And the people who see it but can't read it either assume that it says something profound or pretend to be able to understand my wonderful insights. It's a case of the Emperor's New Manuscript.

Finally, if you have this phenomenon in your own situation, you can not only show your friends ("Oh, that's deep," they will say), but you can impress them with a new word. "I have micrographia," you can say.

"Is it contagious?" they will ask.

**2. The unpleasant is made pleasant.** At our house, I'm in charge of following our aging Chihuahua around on his morning rounds and withdraw-

ing whatever deposits he makes on the neighbor's lawn. The good thing about this is that the very first symptom of my getting Parkinson's Disease many years ago was that I lost my sense of smell. True, I cannot smell the perfume on an attractive young woman—but that's good because it keeps me from temptation.

So, pick up after the dog, fix a clogged sewer pipe, get with several friends and chow down on chili and bean burritos before watching the game together in a crowded living room—none of that bothers me.

Besides, you can drop another new word on your friends. "I have anosmia," you can say.

"Have you tried some of the over-the-counter sleep aids?" they will ask.

**3. All my food is mouthwatering.** You know the expression. Delicious food is mouthwatering. It gets the saliva going in anticipation of something truly tasty. Well, my mouth waters (please don't call it drool) all the time. And if I'm not careful, I will water whatever is beneath my chin. The good part, at least in theory, is that when I go to a friend's house for dinner or a party, the hostess thinks I'm really enjoying the food. "Look at him! He's drooling over the food. It must taste especially delicious tonight."

This one comes with a double bonus: You can tell your friends, "I have sialorrhea."

"I always use the pink medicine for that," they will say.

"But sialorrhea isn't the runs. It's hypersalivation."

"Wow," they will say. "I never knew anyone with a disease fifteen letters long. Wait till I tell the gang at the office."

**4. My expression makes me look deep.** The medical folks like to call this feature of Parkinson's Disease "blunted affect" or "masked face," or "hypomimia," or "poker face," but I like to think of it as a pensive, thoughtful, philosophical expression.

"You look so serious," my friends will say. "What's on your mind?"

"Just thinking over an issue relat-

ed to quantum entanglement," I might say. "Can't you tell by the expression on my face?"

"Quantum?" they will ask.

"Yes," I'll say, giving them a sample of my handwriting. "Here's something I've written on it."

"Quantum, huh?" they will say again, shaking their heads and handing back the writing after a brief squint. "We had one of those once, but it was always in the shop and the gas mileage was terrible. You have one now?"

**5. I'm the envy of the room with my soft voice.** Parkies like me supposedly speak very softly, even though our speech volume sounds perfectly normal to us. At a party, we can blab to our heart's content, and the other guests will be too polite to ask, "Would you say that again?" or to say, "What?" "Huh?" or "I can't hear you." Two benefits derive from this.

First, the person or people you are speaking directly to will pretend to agree with you and nod their heads as if in agreement. Not knowing what you're saying, they won't interrupt or contradict you or ask questions you can't answer.

Second, the other guests, noticing that your auditors are leaning in and struggling to hear you, will naturally conclude that you are whispering, which leads to the obvious conclusion that you are telling secrets, gossip, or secret gossip. This thought will drive the entire party wild with curiosity and you will be sought out eagerly for as long as you want to stay.

The truth is, of course, that Parkinson's is not really much fun. But I've always trusted God with my life—and I've been really blessed—so I see no reason to change now. And if I can continue to trust God with a positive attitude, I can endure the future.

"Remember that the greatest honor you can pay to the author of your being is by such a cheerful behavior as discovers a mind satisfied with his dispensations." —Samuel Johnson