

Study: People with Parkinson's may speak up to 60% less

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Credit: Scott Schrage | University Communication

Parkinson's disease can disrupt multiple aspects of a person's functioning, including the volume, rhythm and intonation of their speech. In some cases, a person with Parkinson's will hesitate to speak or pause when speaking, leading even attentive listeners to jump in or talk over that person. Parkinsonism can also impair a person's ability to read nonverbal cues or facially express themselves, throwing off typical

conversational dynamics.

People with Parkinson's often rate themselves worse than their neurotypical peers at conversing, suggesting that they recognize their struggles. Whether those struggles relate to how often a person speaks, though, remains uncertain. To get at the question, researchers have generally employed questionnaires or other self-reporting tools. Unfortunately, people tend to overestimate their speaking time, limiting the validity of those tools.

Michigan State's Jeff Searl and Nebraska's Angela Dietsch addressed the question by asking 30 similarly aged people—15 diagnosed with Parkinson's, 15 not—to wear vocal monitors for three days while going about their daily routines.

The 15 people with Parkinson's spoke an average of 54 fewer minutes per day—about 60% less than those without the neurodegenerative disorder. And people with Parkinson's who scored higher on the Voice Handicap Index, a self-reported measure of how much vocal issues affect quality of life, tended to speak less than those who scored lower.

While acknowledging that vocalization is just one way of engaging with people, Searl and Dietsch said their study backs up prior research in suggesting that people with Parkinson's converse less frequently than their peers.

If additional studies with larger samples support the team's findings, tracking the percentage of time spent speaking might eventually help assess Parkinson's-related communication risks and gauge the effectiveness of Parkinson's-focused interventions, the researchers said.

More information: Jeff Searl et al, Daily Phonatory Activity of Individuals With Parkinson's Disease, *Journal of Voice* (2021). [DOI:](#)

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