Parkinson's Disease, also known as Parkinsonian Syndrome, or PD, is a motor system disorder that primarily impacts an individual's physical movement. Although tremors are the most well-known symptom of PD, the disease frequently manifests itself in the form of severe stiffness, impaired coordination, speech changes, and in later stages, dementia. PD is a degenerative disease, so it may start with minor symptoms which become progressively worse. Although there is no cure for PD, there are several medications which can help to control symptoms, and in some cases surgery may be recommended.

Social Security Administration’s Medical Listing 11.06

If you are an adult who has been diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease, you may be eligible for Social Security Disability benefits (SSDI) based on the criteria identified in the Social Security Administration’s Listing of Impairments 11.06, Parkinsonian Syndrome.

Currently, the SSA defines Parkinsonian Syndrome as “significant rigidity, bradykinesia (extreme slowness of movements and reflex), or tremor in two extremities, which, singly or in combination, result in sustained disturbance of gross and dexterous movements, or gait and station.” Notably, this definition is over 20 years old, and it fails to recognize many of the non-motor symptoms of Parkinson’s disease, which may include speech impairment, difficulty swallowing, sleep disturbance, cognition deficits, depression, dementia, and pain.

Qualifying for Benefits Based on a Reduced Residual Functional Capacity

If your PD symptoms don’t meet the guidelines in the above listing, you could still potentially qualify for benefits if your symptoms prevent you from sustaining full-time competitive employment.

The Social Security Administration will review your medical records, your reports of your symptoms, and the opinion of your treating physicians. SSA may also send you to see a Consultative Examiner to obtain an additional medical opinion concerning the severity of your illness and related limitations. You will then be assigned a residual functional capacity (RFC), which is the heaviest classification of work that the SSA feels you are capable of performing (such as sedentary, light, or heavy work.) The SSA will then consider your age, level of education,
and prior work experience to determine if there are any jobs that you would be able to do on a consistent basis.

If you have other physical or mental conditions that impact your ability work, it is extremely important that that information is articulated in your application for benefits. Social Security will also consider those factors when making their determination.

**Medical Evidence is Critical to Establishing Disability based on Parkinson’s Disease**

If you’re applying for disability benefits due to Parkinson’s Disease, it’s essential that the SSA has access to recent medical records documenting your condition. Although they will take your testimony regarding your symptoms into consideration, it’s important that they have **objective evidence** that shows the severity of your condition. Your medical records should establish:

- a specific diagnosis of Parkinson's Disease
- documentation by your doctor concerning the nature and frequency of your symptoms, and
- the results of neuroimaging tests confirming your PD diagnosis.

In addition to medical records, it’s important that you provide examples of exactly how your symptoms affect your daily activities, such as if you have trouble gripping or holding onto items due to tremors or stiffness. Be sure to provide any other relevant information such as negative side effects from your prescribed medications, and any depression or anxiety that you experience due to your PD.