

## What Ages Does Parkinson's Affect?

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In the western world, Parkinson's Disease is traditionally associated with the older generations, since it's quite rare that anyone below the age of 50 is diagnosed with it. However, alarming new research from the UAE shows that Emirati citizens – and females in particular – may be more susceptible to contracting the disease much earlier in life.

According to the Parkinson's Centre of Excellence at the King's College London hospital in Dubai, individuals between the age of 30 and 35 have been diagnosed with it. In fact, the youngest Parkinson's sufferer on the Centre's books is just 29 years old, begging the question of why Emiratis seem to be an exception when it comes to the affliction.

### Ground-breaking research

Even though the very first scientific paper on Parkinson's Disease was written by the eponymous James Parkinson over two centuries ago, research into its prevalence in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has been conspicuous by its absence until very recently. Indeed, Saudi Arabia is the only country which has investigated the disease prior to the latest Emirati study.

This research, known as the Emirates' Parkinson's study (or EmPark study for short), was the first of its kind in the UAE and demonstrated that there is a much higher prevalence of the disease among younger people in the UAE (especially among females) than elsewhere. Generally speaking, the global average for Parkinson's sufferers tends to be between 75 and 85 years old.

### Raising awareness

The findings were revealed at a fashion show being hosted by the Centre in order to raise awareness surrounding the disease. The event is part of a wider programme known as "Connecting Communities: I am the first, you are the next, come and test" and has been organised by the people, for the people.

According to Dr Vinod Metta, more events of this kind are needed to ensure that the affliction is properly understood and caught early in those susceptible to it. He is spearheading the work at the Centre, which opened in 2020 with just one patient but has since swelled rapidly in size to now count over 600 sufferers on its books.

### More research needed

Comparisons with work already undertaken in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) show that Emiratis tend to experience Parkinson's tremors in their lower limbs initially, while those in the Kingdom are more likely to suffer them in the upper limbs. Tunisian and Moroccan

sufferers of Parkinson's also exhibit different symptoms, too, and more research is needed to understand why these discrepancies occur.

Most concerningly of all, of course, is the relative youth of Emirati Parkinson's patients in comparison with the rest of the world, with some diagnoses being given at less than half the age of the global average. Whether this is down to diet, lifestyle or genetic factors remains to be seen, but the valuable work being conducted by the Centre promises to shine a light on the phenomenon regardless.