

I found things really difficult to the point where I would cry myself to sleep. Looking back, these memories are quite difficult to cope with, they are so vivid.”

Bronagh had her suspicions but couldn't pinpoint what was wrong. Friends also started to notice Paul's worsening symptoms. They commented on the fact that he was 'grumpy', when really this was a result of his reduced facial expressions.

A year after his initial diagnosis, things became too difficult and Paul made the decision to tell his wife. While understandably a little angry that Paul had not been open from the start, Paul says that Bronagh took the diagnosis well and was glad to know what was going on. He now wishes that he had told her earlier, as his symptoms might not have been as bad in the early days. He also feels that the stress of keeping things to himself took its toll.

With hindsight, it's easy for Paul to reflect that it was the wrong choice not to tell his family about the diagnosis. He now says: “This has got to be the stupidest thing I have ever done. Looking back, I was so silly to do what I did. When I think of it, it was really harmful to my wellbeing – mentally and physically.”

Having accepted his diagnosis and been open with family and friends, Paul has been able to come to terms with what Parkinson's means for his life and his future. This allows him to be proactive in taking control of his condition, and things seem much brighter. For Paul, there have even been unexpected benefits.

“I now have done more than I would have had I not been diagnosed. I have made so many new friendships and my confidence has really improved. I even sang at my daughter's wedding in September last year. A few years ago, I would have struggled even thinking about speaking in front of people, let alone singing!”

“My advice to anyone receiving a diagnosis is be open with friends and family,” says Paul. “You will definitely need their support, and they can also help you tell others of your condition.”

Moving forward after diagnosis

Everyone needs time to come to terms with life-changing news. Here, Clinical Psychologist, Dr Patapia Tzotzoli, (pictured) gives tips for dealing with a Parkinson's diagnosis.



- Find out more, but make sure your information is from a trusted source. Talk to others with Parkinson's to learn more about living with the condition.
- Remember that Parkinson's affects people differently. Focus on what you can do – exercise or hobbies – that help you maintain a sense of control over your health.
- Take notice – of your skills, of beautiful experiences, and of the world around you. Savour moments and be mindful. Appreciate what's here, right now.
- Remember, you have choice and control in decisions about your health. Take an active role and be open about your priorities, setting realistic goals with the help of your specialist or Parkinson's nurse.
- If you are struggling, speak to a professional. Therapies are available, such as acceptance and commitment therapy and cognitive behavioural therapy. You can work with a psychologist to find a therapy that suits you. You can find a psychologist on the British Psychological Society (BPS) website, www.bps.org.uk or call **0116 254 9568**.

You may find it helpful to attend our self-management programme, Path through Parkinson's. The course brings people with Parkinson's, partners and carers together to discuss planning for the future and what's important to you. Visit parkinsons.org.uk/selfmanagement or call **020 7963 3924**. ■