

Youngsters too at risk of Parkinson's disease: Docs

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Chennai: Karthik*, 24, could sense gradual changes in his behaviour. He was tired for a few hours in a day, was distracted easily and had frequent mood swings. Since these were signs of depression, doctors prescribed anti-psychotic drugs. But the situation got worse. A visit to a neurologist revealed he had Parkinson's disease, an affliction believed to be confined to the elderly.

Dr Sathish Kumar, neurologist at Fortis Malar, says Parkinson's disease is a progressive disorder that affects nerve cells responsible for the body's motor functions.

"In Karthik's case, no one would have considered Parkinson's disease, given his

APRIL 11: WORLD PARKINSON'S DAY

age. But now many youngsters, even below 30 years, come to us with Young Onset Parkinson's Disease (YOPD). The symptoms are different from the disease that affects elderly people," he said.

Parkinson's disease is characterised by tremors and lack of control over body movements, but people with YOPD display behavioural changes and experience stiffness of muscles that make them sluggish.

Trauma and head injuries also cause youngsters to develop Parkinson's, said a neurologist at Global Health City, Dr K Sridhar. "In Parkinson's disease, the nerves function abnormally due to lack of the brain chemical dopamine. Sometimes when a person has a head injury, part of the brain that produces the chemical may be damaged, leading to onset of the disease," he said. Lifestyle changes and stress can trigger small vessel diseases in the brain, he said.

Dr Sathish warned that there are chances of YOPD being mistaken as a psychological disorder as symptoms are similar. "Early recognition is the key," he said.

(* Name changed)