



National Prescribing Service Limited

MEDIA RELEASE

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Independent review of new Parkinson's medicine

Parkinson's disease affects more than 80,000 Australians. In the latest edition of *Medicine Update* the National Prescribing Service (NPS) provides an independent review of pramipexole (Sifrol), which can be used to treat the symptoms of Parkinson's disease.

Medicine Update is an online publication aimed at consumers and provides independent information about medicines added to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme to help people have informed discussions about new medicines with their health professionals.

Parkinson's disease is a disease of the brain that affects movement. The key characteristics include shakiness (especially in the hands), muscle stiffness and slowness of movement. These symptoms are caused by a lack of dopamine, a naturally-occurring chemical produced in the brain. Pramipexole is one of several medicines called 'dopamine agonists' that work in a similar way to dopamine.

"People in the early stages of Parkinson's disease who are thinking about starting a medicine for the first time may be able to choose between a dopamine agonist like pramipexole, and levodopa, another medicine commonly used to treat the symptoms of Parkinson's disease. Either medicine can be suitable, but the choice is not simple and depends on each patient's situation and preferences," NPS clinical adviser, Judith Mackson said.

"Eventually most people with Parkinson's disease will take levodopa to help control their symptoms. Levodopa is known to be effective but can have some unpleasant long-term side effects. Starting out with a dopamine agonist such as pramipexole may mean that people can delay starting treatment with levodopa. This, in turn, can delay some of the long-term side effects of levodopa."

Pramipexole may also be used when the disease has progressed. In this case pramipexole is usually added to levodopa.

However, pramipexole may not control the symptoms of Parkinson's disease as well as levodopa, and it is not without its own side effects — for example, it's more common to experience hallucinations and confusion with pramipexole than with levodopa.

"In the end the decision needs to balance the potential side effects of the medicines with how well they control symptoms," Ms Mackson said.

Pramipexole is available in three different strengths so as with all medicines it's important to understand which strength you have been prescribed and how often it needs to be taken. When starting any new medicine read the consumer information leaflet and talk to your doctor or pharmacist if you have any questions.

To learn more about the issues that need to be considered before taking pramipexole including short-term and long-term benefits and side effects, download [Medicines Update](#) at www.nps.org.au.

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