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The impact of Parkinson's disease and chronic stroke on simple multitasking abilities

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It is hypothesised that Parkinson's disease and Chronic strokes may interfere with patient's ability to multitask. Both diseases cause the inability to perform simple activities such as walking and mental mathematics simultaneously. In patients with chronic stroke or Parkinson's disease, special attention must be paid to these impairments as they significantly affect independent living. In a controlled sample of 15 patients of Indian origin with either Chronic stroke or Parkinson's disease it was observed that there was a significant deterioration in the ability to multitask (increase in time taken to multitask between Timed up and Go (TUG) and Dual Timed up and Go (Dual TUG) versus a normal control group). The study found that the average increase in time required to complete the tests was 49% (for Chronic Stroke patients) and 36% (for patients with Parkinson's disease) as compared to a normal baseline of less than 10%. This study effectively shows that TUG dual task scores are significantly higher than TUG scores in the Chronic Stroke and the Parkinson's disease population. This shows a definite involvement of attention to a supposedly automatic activity such as gait. Most people can walk and perform simple cognitive tasks at the same time such as talking, texting or performing simple calculations. However patients with chronic stroke or Parkinson's are not able to multi or even dual task. We may conclude from this that both Parkinson's disease and chronic stroke do significantly impair multitasking capabilities. Special care must be taken to improve the cortical attention of these patients given that this can significantly affect the ability to live independently.

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