

Parkinson Disease—Fitness and Exercise

Exercise is important for everyone. It is the basis for fitness, and it also helps fight the effects of aging and disease. Exercise is even more important for a person with Parkinson disease (PD). Regular exercise can help people with PD stay more flexible, improve posture, and make overall movement (mobility) easier. Although medication has been the most effective treatment so far, a regular exercise program should always be part of managing PD. Exercise is one of the few treatments that is free, has no side effects, and can actually be enjoyable!

Though exercise is not a cure, it can help the person with PD stay ahead of the changes that will take place. It can help the person feel more in control of their condition.

Physical and Occupational Therapy

Physical and occupational therapists can do the following:

- ✓ Come up with an exercise program.
- ✓ Assess and treat mobility problems (ability to get around) and walking problems.
- ✓ Assess and treat joint or muscle pain that affect the person's ability to perform activities of daily living.
- ✓ Help with poor balance or frequent falling.
- ✓ Teach caregivers proper body mechanics (position) and ways of assisting someone with PD.
- ✓ Refer the person to exercise programs in the community.
- ✓ Treat difficulties with the activities of daily living such as eating, dressing, bathing, and handwriting.
- ✓ Teach the use of adaptive equipment (helping aids).

The doctor or other health care professional should be able to refer you to a therapist in your area. It is best to see a therapist who has special training or experience with PD. Visits to a physical or occupational therapist are usually covered by medical insurance with referral by a physician.

Get a doctor's approval before beginning any aerobic or conditioning program.

Taking Care of Yourself— Aquatic Exercises

Water therapy is a time-tested form of healing. It is also a safe exercise for people with PD because there is no danger of falling. Floating in the water allows for easy movement and little strain on joints and muscles. Look to see if your community has a heated pool that offers an exercise program.

Tai Chi for Parkinson Disease

Tai chi, an ancient martial art characterized by slow, flowing movement and meditation, helps improve balance and movement control for people with Parkinson disease. The finding, published in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, is a study to show the benefits of tai chi for people with chronic health problems. Past studies have shown that tai chi reduces falls and depression among the elderly.

Inspiration

Be optimistic. It feels better. ~ Dalai Lama