

Being Active When You Have Parkinson's Disease

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Do you want to feel better, move better and sleep better? Experts now say that any physical activity counts toward better health – even just a few minutes!

Research clearly shows that regular exercise can reduce the severity of Parkinson's Disease (PD) symptoms and slow down the progression of the signs of the disease. Being active will help you have more stamina, walk better and simply feel better about life. Although exercise will not reverse the disease, positive effects on the brain may help you compensate for some of the changes with PD. Getting started sooner is best and you must stick with it to keep getting the benefits.



Getting Started

Talk with your Doctor

Talk with your health care provider about your interest in being more active. Would a referral to physical therapy help? Are there special exercise programs in your area for those with PD?

Get Expert Help

A physical therapist or exercise physiologist with expertise in PD can design a safe and helpful activity plan based on your likes and dislikes. Share your movement challenges so they can help you avoid falls or injuries.

Design a Plan

Whether you have early or advanced PD, you can benefit from the right kinds of exercise. Movement challenges vary from person to person and change with time, so you'll need to adapt your program as you go along.

Be Active with a Friend

Find an exercise buddy, group or family member and get active together. You can keep each other going. They can also assist you if needed.

Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can.

Parkinson's Disease Tips and Cautions

Most people with PD have a time of day when their symptoms are less. This can change from day to day. Choose a time to exercise when you are at your best.

Find activities you enjoy! Make sure they're safe based on the challenges that your PD symptoms present at this time.

If you are sad or anxious, consider a mind-body activity such as yoga to help reduce anxiety, depression and improve how you're feeling about life.

If you have problems swallowing or being understood, seek the help of a speech-language pathologist. Your voice and face will respond to movement training.

When doing exercises, focus on your movement in the NOW – don't jump ahead to the next step. Cut out distractions.

Aerobic Activity

Aerobic activity increases your breathing and heart rate, will improve your stamina and can help slow the progression of PD. Build up to doing at least 150 minutes/week of moderate- intensity activity (such as stationary cycling, rowing, water exercise, walking or dancing with a partner). If you have balance difficulties or freezing episodes, an indoor bicycle or water exercise may be safer than walking or running.

What?

Any rhythmic, continuous activity

How often?

3-4 days/week

How hard?

Fairly light to start or if you have advanced PD. Build to somewhat hard/ hard for those with mild to moderate PD.

How much?

Start with 5-10 minutes/day. Gradually build up to 30 minutes over the day.

Remember: Your time can be cumulative. Fit in 5 or 10 minutes here and there. Or go for 20-30 minutes. Be active however and wherever you can. You can mix different aerobic activities during each session. Doing anything is better than doing nothing!

To stay safe and injury free:

- Start slowly and gradually increase your time and effort.
- If walking for exercise, try using walking or hiking poles to help with balance.
- Cycling classes for those with PD have shown good results, particularly when you are coached or forced to pedal fast.
- Warm up and cool down at an easy pace for 5 to 10 minutes before and after exercise. Gradually increase your pace and time spent being active. Start low and go slow. Warm up and cool down for a few minutes at an easy pace before and after exercise.

Strength Training

Strength training is important for people with Parkinson's disease because it builds muscle. Loss of muscle is common for people with PD. Strength training can improve daily function such as standing up from a chair and lifting groceries.

What?

Resistance bands, weight machines, or your own body (for example, sit-to-stands or squats at the kitchen counter)

How often?

2 to 3 days/week
*Rest day in between

How hard?

Start with easy effort and gradually build up to medium to hard effort

How much?

8-12 repetitions to start (for each major muscle group). Start with 1 set. Build up to 3 sets.

Remember: Avoid free weights if you have advanced PD since they're easier to drop. Get help from a physical therapist or certified exercise professional who can teach you the right way to do exercises, which ones are best for you and how to breathe properly.

Strength Training Tips and Cautions

- Focus on the muscles of your back, butt and hips to help you stand up straighter.
- Muscle soreness may mean you did too much, but it will go away. Build up slowly.
- Doing strength training exercises on a soft surface, balance pad or disc can help your balance, but have someone nearby if needed.

Flexibility

Parkinson's disease can affect flexibility, so exercises to improve your posture and movement and keep your joints from being stiff are important. Focus on your chest, arms, trunk and neck. There are two kinds of flexibility exercises, slow stretching and moving a joint through its full range of motion (ROM), for example, arm circles and trunk turns. Motion is the lotion of a joint!

What?

Range of motion (ROM) exercises and stretching

How often?

2-3 days/week or daily

How hard?

Gently move your joints around as much as you can. Use large, exaggerated movements. Stretch to the point of feeling muscle tightness and hold.

How much?

10 repetitions of active ROM exercises for your affected joints. Hold static stretches for 10-30 seconds. Repeat 2-4 times.