

# Caregiver Assistance News

“CARING FOR YOU...CARING FOR OTHERS”

## 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

A licensed physical therapist (PT) or occupational therapist (OT) can answer specific questions or problems you or the person in your care may have.

Physical and occupational therapists can do the following:

- ☑ Come up with an exercise program to meet the special needs of the person in your care.
- ☑ 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.

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## The Basics of Exercise

Good physical fitness is made up of three types of exercise: stretching, strengthening, and aerobics, such as deep breathing. Each is important by itself, but together they can help the person in your care remain active as long as possible. This will help the person deal better with PD and the changes it may bring.

### 1. Stretching

Regular *s-t-r-e-t-c-h-i-n-g* is the first step, and it can be one of the most enjoyable. Stretching helps combat the muscle rigidity (stiffness) that comes with PD. It also helps muscles and joints stay flexible (able to bend). People who are more flexible have an easier time with everyday movement.

Stretching increases range of motion of joints and helps with good posture. It protects against muscle strains or sprains, improves circulation, and releases muscle tension. Stretching can be done anytime—even before getting out of bed and while watching television or riding in the car.

### 2. Strengthening

Strengthening certain muscles can help the person with PD stand up straighter. It can make certain tasks easier, such as getting up from a chair. Exercises also help to make bones stronger, so a person is less likely to get a fracture if he or she falls.

### 3. Deep Breathing

People with PD often take shallow breaths. Their lungs do not fill completely, which leads to tension, fatigue and poor quality of speech. Learning how to take full, deep breaths will expand the lungs, bring in more oxygen, and relax the person.

Practice breathing deeply:

1. Sit or lie down. Gently place the palms over the lower abdomen.
2. Take a full breath in through the nose (inhale), allowing the upper chest to expand. If the exercise is done correctly, the abdomen should lift.
3. Slowly breathe out (exhale) through the mouth. The exhale should last longer than the inhale.
4. Do this exercise for 5 minutes a day, or at any time, to feel relaxed.

**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

## Live Life Laughing!

I enjoy a glass of wine each night for its health benefits. The other glasses are for my witty comebacks and flawless dance moves.



## Memory Care

Some people with PD complain of slowness in thinking and difficulty finding the right words. When these cognitive changes happen, the caregiver often will finish the person's sentences. Often, the person with PD will begin to avoid conversation. These mild changes are handled well by most people.

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## SAFETY TIPS—Preventing Falls

With PD, a person now must think about things to reduce falls that he was able to do easily before.

1. Try not to move too quickly.
2. When walking, the foot should land with the heel striking down first.
3. **DO NOT** pivot the body over the feet when turning. Instead, try making a “U-turn” while walking.
4. When standing in place and ready to turn, make sure the feet and the body move together.
5. Never lean too far forward.
6. The moment you begin to shuffle or freeze, try to come to a complete stop. Take a breath and start again, focusing on that first step and striking down heel first.
7. Do not carry too many things while you are walking.
8. Avoid walking backwards.

NEXT ISSUE... FIRE SAFETY AT HOME - UNHEALTHY AIR