

Parkinson Disease and Exercise

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Fact Sheet

The Benefits of Exercise and Parkinson Disease

Exercise is strongly recognized as a key element to improving and maintaining health, mobility and signs and symptoms related to Parkinson Disease. Some of the areas that are positively impacted by exercise include:

PD Signs and Symptoms

- Decreased tremors
- Less fatigue
- Less stiffness
- Improved strength and speed of movement

PD related movement

- Improved walking speed
- Improved endurance
- Better balance
- Improved activities of daily living

General Health and Wellness

- Improved heart and lung health
- Improved brain health
- Improved mood
- Better sleep
- Improved memory
- Improved quality of life

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Which exercises are the best for people with Parkinson Disease?

A clinical practice guideline on the physical therapy management of individuals with PD strongly recommends aerobic, strengthening and balance exercises. Before initiating an exercise program, consult with a physical therapist to establish a safe and appropriate exercise routine. It is recommended to consult with a PT on an annual or biannual basis to adjust exercise routines.

Some important considerations for each include:

Parkinson Disease and Exercise

Aerobic Exercise

- This is the most important type of exercise and will give you the most bang for your buck!
- The goal of aerobic exercise is to perform it for 30-40 minutes at a moderate to high intensity at least 3 days/week
- Most research showing benefits of this exercise is done walking on a treadmill or stationary bike; but can also be achieved with any activity you enjoy that will elevate the heart rate such as walking briskly outdoors, swimming, or using an elliptical

Strengthening Exercise

- Strengthening with a focus on the leg and back muscles can improve mobility and posture
- The goal is to perform strengthening exercises 2 nonconsecutive days per week for 30-60 minutes per session
- When first starting, strengthening exercises use lighter weights with more repetitions (able to finish 20-30 reps). Once comfortable with a program it is important to slowly progress to heavier weights with less repetitions (able to finish 10-12 reps)
- Strengthening exercises can be done using body weight, weight machines, free-weights or resistance bands

Balance Exercise

- Balance exercises are important to start early to reduce the risk of falling and improve mobility
- The goal is to perform some type of balance activity 2-3 days/week for at least 20-30 minutes
- If balance loss is not a concern, community classes such as tai chi, boxing, and ballroom dancing can be appropriate
- If balance loss is a concern, balance exercises and training should be performed under the supervision of a physical therapist

Other types of exercises recommended include flexibility exercises to decrease stiffness and improve range of motion, exercises with specific cues to improve movement, and task specific training to improve the ability to do specific activities.

If you have questions about exercise and PD, or are looking for a PT in your area that specializes in PT, the American Parkinson Disease Association (APDA) partnered with PT researchers at Center for Neurorehabilitation at Boston University have a “helpline” to answer your questions. **Toll Free Number: 888-606-1688 or email rehab@bu.edu**

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