

Parkinson's Disease.....*exercise can help!*

By Stephanie Arendell, DPT

Parkinson's disease is a condition that affects control over movements. It is caused by ongoing changes in a small area of the brain. This part of the brain helps to control movement and balance, and for reasons that are unclear, the cells in this part of the brain stop working. This leads to symptoms of Parkinson's disease, such as shaking or tremors, stiffness, slow movements, balance problems, and other symptoms such as speaking too softly and trouble swallowing. Parkinson's symptoms are often mild at first, however it is a progressive disease, and the symptoms tend to worsen over time. There is no known cure for Parkinson's disease but proper treatment can help ease the symptoms and allow a full and active life.

Taking medication and surgery are some of the treatment options that can ease symptoms and improve the quality of life. However, staying active is a vital part of treatment. With Parkinson's disease, movements begin to slow and become less automatic. Because activities become exceedingly more difficult, the tendency is to do less, but it is extremely important to keep moving. Regular exercise helps keep muscles strong and loose and can also improve balance and coordination. It is also crucial for personal health and wellness and can greatly improve how one feels as it helps the body to work more efficiently.

If you, or a family member, have been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, a qualified healthcare provider can help you choose activities that meet your exercise needs. Walking is one of the best exercises, and even doing daily household chores or errands can help keep you moving. However, a word of caution, it is not recommended that you push yourself. There is nothing to be gained. If you become fatigued, exercise for shorter periods of time followed by periods of rest. Keeping your mind active with reading, doing puzzles or playing table games is also very beneficial.

To help you design an exercise program that meets your functional needs, your doctor may refer you to a Physical Therapist or other exercise professional. They can teach you best ways to safely exercise while gaining the maximum benefit. You'll learn to do exercises that stretch and strengthen your muscles. You'll also learn how to move safely to minimize the likelihood of injury.

A Parkinson's Exercise Club is currently offered through Professional Therapy Services, Inc. and Methodist Outpatient Therapy Services. Each session is comprised of aerobic exercise, stretching, strengthening, and balance activities. Participants exercise at a level consistent with their ability and the functional goals they wish to maintain. Each session is led and supervised by licensed and trained therapist. Each participant's activity level is monitored during each session to determine progress toward their desired goals.

To learn more about the exercise program or other services offered, please contact Professional Therapy Services, Inc. at 309/674-7874 or Methodist Outpatient Therapy Services at 309/672-4568.

Learning how to manage the debilitating affects of Parkinson's disease takes time and a personal commitment to staying active. To learn more about Parkinson's disease, visit www.parkinson.org, www.pdf.org, or www.apdaparkinson.org.