



# Exercise for Parkinson's Disease: Essential Facts for Patients

## WHY IS EXERCISE IMPORTANT?

Movement, slowness, and stiffness can be difficult when you live with Parkinson's disease (PD). Slowness in particular can make you feel weak and is very unsatisfying. Adding regular exercise may improve your overall mobility and quality of life.

## WHAT IS THE ROLE OF EXERCISE IN PD?

Exercise is a planned, structured and repetitive physical activity. It is a complement to:

- Other physical activity
- Medications
- Surgery
- Physical therapy
- Occupational therapy

Exercise programs can help you stay active and support your daily living activities. Be sure to define your goals before you begin a program. It is important for patients to conduct their exercises during an 'on' period when possible.

## HOW DOES EXERCISE BENEFIT THINKING AND MEMORY?

The brain can form and reorganize connections. It's known as neuroplasticity. There is some evidence that exercise may improve neuroplasticity. Exercise can help improve attention, thinking and memory. Physical activities may benefit brain areas related to learning. This effect is more obvious in early disease phases. To increase exercise's benefit, include:

- Physical or spoken feedback
- Attention tasks, such as walking and doing a memory test at the same time
- Motivational rewards

## WHAT MOTOR SYMPTOMS OF PD CAN IMPROVE WITH EXERCISE?

Patients often complain about difficulties with walking, mobility, posture, and balance as PD advances. These symptoms may improve with exercise. The risk of falls may also decrease.

## DOES EXERCISE HAVE ANY ADDITIONAL BENEFITS?

Exercise may improve movement, thinking and memory function. You may also find exercise can have a positive impact on your physical appearance, mood, and social interactions. You may experience:

- Better arm and leg strength
- Core muscle strength
- More muscle flexibility

## WHAT TYPE OF EXERCISES ARE RECOMMENDED?

There is no exercise that clearly is better than another. The most important thing is to do exercise that you enjoy and will continue. This can include cardio exercise (exercise cycle, elliptical machine) and light lifting of weights. Do not overdo exercise or put yourself at risk for falling. Researchers have studied and recommend several exercises for people with PD. Some examples include:

- Tai chi
- Tango dancing
- Exercising on a treadmill or elliptical machine
- Cycling

## WHAT SYMPTOM-SPECIFIC EXERCISES ARE RECOMMENDED?

- **Tai chi.** This exercise helps posture control. It can also improve control of your center of gravity, reducing the risk and number of falls.
- **Tango dancing.** This activity supports your body and brain. It can help increase coordination with a partner, spatial awareness and ability to focus.
- **Exercising on a treadmill or elliptical machine.** This may improve how you walk, step or run (your gait). It may also help improve your speed, stride length, balance and gait rhythm. Adjust the speed and slope to make this exercise more effective. However, be very careful about falling.

**Cycling.** It may help to improve the walking speed and cadence.

It is important that you talk to your doctor before beginning an exercise plan.