

PARKINSON'S DISEASE: EXERCISE FACT SHEET

It is important for people with Parkinson's disease to stay active and mobile. However, your fitness needs will depend on your stage of Parkinson's disease and other health conditions that you may have. Before you start a new fitness program it is important to discuss your plans with your primary care physician and your neurologist. When designing an exercise regimen, it is important to consider the changes in your flexibility, walking, balance, and blood pressure so you can develop an appropriate exercise plan that can help improve your Parkinson's symptoms.

The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) recommends that people with Parkinson's disease include aerobic conditioning, strength training, stretching, functional exercises, and exercises geared toward your specific Parkinson's disease symptoms.¹ A physical therapist or exercise physiologist who works with people with Parkinson's can help you put together a safe and comprehensive fitness program that fits your individual needs.

Aerobic Conditioning: Participating in conditioning exercise--such as walking for endurance, or using an exercise bike--can help improve your overall fitness and health. Your doctor, therapist, or trainer can help you determine a target heart rate to make sure you are getting a good workout.

Strength Training: Strength training can be performed using weight machines, resistance tubing/bands, your body weight, or household objects like a milk jug. Exercises like calf raises, mini squats, shoulder blade squeezes, and chin tucks can help improve strength as well as balance, functional mobility, and posture.

Stretching: People with Parkinson's disease can become rigid, which makes everyday activities--like rolling over in bed and putting on shoes or a coat--more difficult. One common stretch recommended for people with Parkinson's disease is a trunk twist while sitting in a chair or while lying in bed with your knees bent.

Functional Exercises: In order to maintain or improve your functional abilities, you can practice activities that you find are getting more difficult. For example, you can practice standing up from a chair 10 times, or rolling from side to side in a bed.

Parkinson's Specific Exercises: Due to the changes in your brain, Parkinson's disease can cause you to have difficulty with your balance and walking, such as increased falls, taking smaller steps, and having a hard time sitting/standing up straight. Your therapists can help you to design an exercise program that fits your needs and that you can perform safely at home.

Resources

1. Protas EJ, Stanley RK. 2003. Parkinson's disease. In *ACSM's. Exercise Management for Persons with Chronic Diseases and Disabilities*, 2nd Ed. 2003. 295-302. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
2. American Physical Therapy Association. Find a PT. www.apta.org
3. National Parkinson's Foundation Booklet. "Fitness Counts." Order for free at www.parkinson.org (click on Publications) or order from 1-800-327-4545.