

# PARKINSON'S DISEASE



**Has your loved one been diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease (PD)? While any diagnosis can be scary, know that PD itself is not fatal. With early detection and proper care, your senior can still experience many years of fulfillment.**

Source: [ParkinsonsDisease.net](https://www.parkinsonsdisease.net)

Parkinson's Disease is a brain disorder that leads to shaking, stiffness, and difficulty with walking, balance, and coordination. Symptoms usually begin gradually and worsen over time. As the disease progresses, people may have difficulty walking and talking. While speech and movements are affected, often the patients retain full mental capacity and can participate in their own care plan.

## Parkinson's Disease has four main symptoms:

- Tremor (trembling) in hands, arms, legs, jaw, or head
- Stiffness of the limbs and trunk
- Slowness of movement
- Impaired balance and coordination, sometimes leading to falls

## Ancillary to the main symptoms, you may see the following in your loved one:

- Difficulty swallowing, chewing, and speaking
- Less animated facial expressions
- Sleep disruption
- Changed handwriting
- Urinary issues
- Skin problems
- Depression
- Soft speech

The progression of PD can be slow, and the initial signs may be very subtle. There is no test for the disease, so attention to detail is important to help your physician make a diagnosis.

Source: [National Institute on Aging](https://www.nia.nih.gov) and [ParkinsonsDisease.net](https://www.parkinsonsdisease.net)



## Exercise for Parkinson's Disease



**Aerobic Activity** – 3 days a week for 30 minutes per session

Activities can include brisk walking, running, cycling, swimming, and an aerobics class.



**Strength Training** – 2–3 non-consecutive days for 30 minutes per session

Training can include weight machines, resistance bands, and light/moderate handheld weights.



**Balance Exercises** – 2–3 days per week with daily smaller activities

Exercises should include activities that require multi-directional stepping, weight shifting, dynamic balance activities, large movements, and multitasking such as yoga, tai chi, dance, or boxing.



**Stretching** – 2–3 days per week with daily stretches being ideal

Stretches should work on sustained stretching with deep breathing or dynamic stretching before exercise.

Source: [Parkinson's Foundation](https://www.parkinsonsfoundation.org)

## The primary dangers for PD patients are from falling or from pneumonia.

Since PD affects the neural pathways controlling movement and balance, even walking on flat, even surfaces can be difficult to navigate. Falls that require surgery carry multiple risks to our older adults related to medications, blood clots and heart involvement.

PD also eventually affects the ability to swallow, leading to an increased risk of aspirating food or drink into their lungs. While many of us can "cough up" items that we've swallowed incorrectly, those with PD may be unable to do this. This, in turn, can lead to pneumonia and other pulmonary complications. Coughing serves a purpose in usual illnesses to clear mucous and phlegm from our chests to keep it from building up and becoming infected. Unfortunately, our loved ones with PD are not able to adequately cough to clear this and are at risk for multiple more risky conditions, including pneumonia and the need for hospitalization.

Source: [National Institute on Aging](https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/article/2017/05/17/parkinsons-disease) and [ParkinsonsDisease.net](http://ParkinsonsDisease.net)

## Your Care Team

As with many of the diseases that can affect our older adults, staying active and pursuing a healthy diet can slow the progression of the disease.



Finding an occupational therapist who is skilled in the needs of PD patients will be important to help modify daily activities like eating and drinking, chores, and management of technology and can help your loved one continue to live a productive life.

Over half of patients will experience a level of depression connected with the diagnosis. Involving a therapist early in the diagnosis can help them handle the emotional challenges.

Your loved one can also benefit from including a movement disorder specialist on their care team. This is a neurologist that specializes in movement disorders such as Parkinson's. These specialists usually ensure that they are on the cutting edge of new therapies for PD.

Source: [The Michael J Fox Foundation](http://TheMichaelJFoxFoundation.org)

## Diet for Parkinson's Disease

- Drink six glasses of water per day to help medications break down more efficiently.
- Fiber-rich foods will help deter constipation.
- Limit sugar, alcohol, and caffeine in the evening to help eliminate barriers to sleep.
- Ensure adequate vitamin D to help with bone health.
- Include nuts like walnuts and cashews to promote brain health.
- Incorporate berries like blueberries and strawberries for their antioxidant properties.
- Eating foods like salmon, tuna, and dark leafy vegetables, which contain anti-inflammatory properties for our brains.



Source: [Parkinson's Foundation](http://Parkinson's Foundation)

