

# Physiotherapy and Parkinson's

**P**eople with Parkinson's may find that they have problems with everyday movements such as walking, sitting and standing.

This information sheet looks at what difficulties you may experience and how physiotherapy can help. It also discusses what advice physiotherapists can give carers too.

## What is a physiotherapist?

Physiotherapists are healthcare professionals who help keep people moving and functioning as much as possible when they are affected by injury, illness or long-term conditions, such as Parkinson's. They are part of the multidisciplinary team who can help you manage your condition.

Physiotherapists work in a wide variety of health settings, such as intensive care, mental health, occupational health and care of older people.

Like doctors, physiotherapists train and specialise in different conditions. Some work specifically with neurological conditions such as Parkinson's or multiple sclerosis.

Seeing a physiotherapist can make a real difference to people with Parkinson's and their carers (if they have one). So we recommend that you are referred to a physiotherapist by your GP, specialist or Parkinson's nurse (if you have one) as soon as possible after your diagnosis. Clinical guidelines recommend that physiotherapy should be available for people with Parkinson's.

## How can a physiotherapist help me?

Physiotherapists will do an assessment to see how Parkinson's is affecting you. This can be done if you are newly diagnosed, or have been diagnosed for some time.

“ I was referred to a physiotherapist for a neck injury. He was very interested in Parkinson's and had been on a course specifically on the condition. I was so impressed. I came away with lots of information that works. He gave me some tips for problems, such as freezing in doorways, and some exercises that I have found very helpful. ”

### **Josie, diagnosed in 2007**

In the early stages of Parkinson's, your treatment may be mainly focused on keeping your fitness levels up, to help you stay independent. In the later stages of Parkinson's your physiotherapist may focus on your walking, posture and balance. They may also start to work with your support network – involving your family and carers as part of your treatment.

These are some of the ways your physiotherapist may be able to help you.

#### [Improving or maintaining your muscle strength through exercise](#)

A physiotherapist can help you to maintain your fitness by providing an exercise programme for you to follow at home. They may also give advice on suitable sports activities such as golf or swimming, or an exercise class like yoga or tai chi. Exercise can help to lessen stress that can make the symptoms of Parkinson's worse.

**Find out more:** [see our exercise booklet and DVD, Keeping moving.](#)

#### [Helping you stay flexible and able to move about](#)

A physiotherapist can show you how to work on stiff muscles and joints to maintain posture and keep your joints flexible. This will help to relieve any stiffness. It will also help you to move more smoothly.

They can also teach you techniques that help make some automatic movements, such as walking, sitting

down and standing up, easier. These may become more difficult as your Parkinson's progresses, but can be improved by learning new ways of doing things.

#### [Helping you to maintain independence in your daily life](#)

If certain movements are difficult, such as getting up out of a chair or turning in bed, a physiotherapist can visit your home and teach you a different way of doing these things. They can also give advice on aids and adaptations that you could use.

In some places, it may be an occupational therapist that deals with home adaptations. Always try and check first with a physiotherapist before you buy any piece of equipment or aid. Because no two people with Parkinson's are alike, what might work for one person might not suit another.

**Find out more:** [see our information sheets, Equipment and disability aids and Occupational therapy and Parkinson's.](#)

#### [Helping to prevent or manage falls](#)

The physiotherapist may work with you on balance training and improving your ability to walk. This training will improve your confidence and help to reduce any fear of falling. They can also teach techniques to help you get up if you fall. Often a physiotherapist will work with an occupational therapist to make sure your home is hazard free.

**Find out more:** [see our information sheets Falls and Parkinson's and Freezing in Parkinson's.](#)

#### [Providing pain relief](#)

Physiotherapists can use methods such as manual therapy, the use of heat, cold, or electrical equipment, such as electrotherapy (eg ultrasound) to help relieve any pain you may have. More therapists are being trained in complementary techniques such as acupuncture, which can also be tried to help to reduce pain.

**Find out more:** [see our information sheet Pain in Parkinson's.](#)

#### [Maintaining or improving effective breathing](#)

Parkinson's can cause stiffness and weakening of the chest muscles, which may lead to chest infections.

A therapist can use positioning or other techniques to help clear the phlegm and keep the chest clear. Breathing exercises may also improve your breathing and can help if your voice has become softer.

### Preventing circulation problems

Physiotherapists can teach you different ways to sit or lie to prevent problems with your circulation. If your movement is very restricted this may affect your circulation as your muscles won't be pumping blood around the body as they move.

### What advice can a physiotherapist give carers?

If you are a carer and help to move a person with Parkinson's move around, it is vitally important that you get advice from a physiotherapist about care of your own body, most importantly your back. They can provide advice on the best way to help the person you are caring for move.

If it becomes necessary to have equipment in the house to help you with these tasks, a physiotherapist or an occupational therapist can advise you on the most suitable equipment to use and the best places to put them.

### How do I find a physiotherapist?

You can be referred to a physiotherapist by your GP, specialist, or Parkinson's nurse. In some areas, you can refer yourself at the local hospital or a Community Health Clinic, depending on the type of service available. You may find you have to wait before you receive an appointment, as most NHS physiotherapy departments have waiting lists.

Some Parkinson's UK local groups have group physiotherapy sessions, check with your local group for details. Call the helpline on **0808 800 0303** or see our website [parkinsons.org.uk/localgroups](http://parkinsons.org.uk/localgroups) to find your local group.

There are also a growing number of private physiotherapists who run clinics and make home visits. When you contact them, make sure that they specialise in helping people with Parkinson's, because not all physiotherapists do.

Be aware that, unlike NHS physiotherapists, those in private practice will charge for their services.

The Physio First website allows you to search for qualified physiotherapists in private practice in your area. Visit their website [www.physiofirst.org.uk](http://www.physiofirst.org.uk)

### More information and support

#### Parkinson's nurses

Parkinson's nurses provide expert advice and support to people with Parkinson's and those who care for them. They can also act as a liaison between other health and social care professionals to make sure your needs are met. Parkinson's nurses may not be available in every area, but your GP or specialist can give you more details on local services.

#### Information and support workers

Our information and support workers provide advice and information for anyone affected by Parkinson's. They can also provide links to local services.

For details of the local information and support worker in your area, contact our helpline on **0808 800 0303** or email [hello@parkinsons.org.uk](mailto:hello@parkinsons.org.uk). You can also find out more on our website at [parkinsons.org.uk/isw](http://parkinsons.org.uk/isw)

#### Our helpline

You can also call our free confidential helpline for general support and information. Call **0808 800 0303** (calls are free from UK landlines and most mobile networks) or email [hello@parkinsons.org.uk](mailto:hello@parkinsons.org.uk)

#### Local groups

Support is available through Parkinson's UK local groups. Visit [parkinsons.org.uk/localgroups](http://parkinsons.org.uk/localgroups) or call our helpline for details of your nearest meeting.

#### Online forum

Speak to others in a similar situation through our online discussion forum at [parkinsons.org.uk/forum](http://parkinsons.org.uk/forum)

#### The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy

**020 7306 6666**  
[www.csp.org.uk](http://www.csp.org.uk)

## Thank you

Thank you very much to everyone who contributed to or reviewed this information sheet:

**Cherry-Ann James, Parkinson's Disease Nurse Specialist, National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery, UCL London**

**Julie Bilclough, Physiotherapist, Northumbria NHS Trust**

Thanks also to our information review group and other people affected by Parkinson's who provided feedback.



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## Physiotherapy and Parkinson's

If you have comments or suggestions about this information sheet, we'd love to hear from you. This will help us ensure that we are providing as good a service as possible.

We'd be very grateful if you could complete this form and return it to [Information Resources, Parkinson's UK, 215 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 1EJ](#). Or you can email us at [publications@parkinsons.org.uk](mailto:publications@parkinsons.org.uk). Thanks!

### Please tick...

- I have Parkinson's. When were you diagnosed? .....
- I'm family/a friend/a carer of someone with Parkinson's
- I'm a professional working with people with Parkinson's

Where did you get this information sheet from?

- GP, specialist or Parkinson's nurse
- Parkinson's UK local group or event
- Our website
- Information and support worker
- Ordered from us directly
- Other .....

We're the Parkinson's support and research charity. Help us find a cure and improve life for everyone affected by Parkinson's.

### Can you help?

At Parkinson's UK, we are totally dependent on donations from individuals and organisations to fund the work that we do. There are many ways that you can help us to support people with Parkinson's. If you would like to get involved, please contact our Supporter Services team on **020 7932 1303** or visit our website at **parkinsons.org.uk/support**. Thank you.

### Parkinson's UK

Free\* confidential helpline **0808 800 0303**

Monday to Friday 9am–8pm, Saturday 10am–2pm. Interpreting available.

Text Relay **18001 0808 800 0303**

(for textphone users only)

**hello@parkinsons.org.uk**

**parkinsons.org.uk**

\*calls are free from UK landlines and most mobile networks.

### How to order our resources

**01473 212115**

**resources@parkinsons.org.uk**

**parkinsons.org.uk/publications**

We make every effort to make sure that our services provide up-to-date, unbiased and accurate information. We hope that this will add to any professional advice you receive and will help you to make any decisions you may face. Please do continue to talk to your health and social care team if you are worried about any aspect of living with Parkinson's.

References for this information sheet can be found in the Microsoft Word version at **parkinsons.org.uk/publications**

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Have you found the publication easy to read/use?  Yes  No

What aspects did you find most helpful? .....

Were you looking for any information that wasn't covered? .....

Do you have any other comments? .....

If you would like to become a member of Parkinson's UK, or are interested in joining our information review group, please complete the details below and we'll be in touch.

Membership  Information review group (who give us feedback on new and updated resources)

Name .....

Address .....

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