

# Physiotherapy and Parkinson's

People with Parkinson's may find they have problems with everyday movements like walking or getting in and out of a chair or bed. Or they may be curious to know what exercise they can and should be doing.

This information looks at how physiotherapy can help with these issues. It also discusses what advice physiotherapists might give carers.

## What is a physiotherapist?

A physiotherapist (often called a physio) is a healthcare professional who helps keep people moving and functioning as much as possible when they have a long-term condition like Parkinson's, or an injury or illness. They're part of your 'multidisciplinary team' – the group of healthcare professionals who can help you manage your condition.

## Where can I find a physiotherapist?

NHS physiotherapists work in lots of different settings, including hospitals and outpatient clinics, as well as community settings, such as care homes, GP surgeries, and people's own homes. However, there may be a waiting list for their services. There are also a number of physiotherapists based in private clinics and some make home visits.

Clinical guidelines recommend that your GP, specialist or other healthcare professional considers referring you to a physiotherapist with experience of Parkinson's when you're in the early stages of the condition for assessment, education and advice, including about physical activity. The guidelines also say you should be offered physiotherapy if you have balance or movement problems.

They also recommend considering the Alexander Technique. This teaches you how to change your movements to help relieve stress and tension in your muscles. Other techniques, such as Pilates, also do this.

We recommend that you ask your GP, specialist or Parkinson's nurse about a referral for physiotherapy as soon as possible after your diagnosis. In some areas, you can refer yourself at the local hospital or a community health centre, depending on the type of service available. If you're referred to an NHS service, there may be a waiting list for appointments.

You can also self-refer to a physiotherapist in private practice, which you will need to pay for. The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy can help you find a private physiotherapist. You can find their contact details at the end of this information. Some Parkinson's UK local groups have group sessions led by a physiotherapist – check with your local group for details.

Call our helpline on **0808 800 0303** or see our website [parkinsons.org.uk/localgroups](https://parkinsons.org.uk/localgroups) to find your local group.

## **What type of physiotherapist should I see?**

Any physiotherapist you see should ideally specialise in Parkinson's.

Like many other healthcare professionals, physiotherapists specialise in different areas of practice. Some work specifically with people with neurological conditions like Parkinson's, and some have additional qualifications in exercise and fitness training, especially those working in gym settings.

## **How can a physiotherapist help me?**

Your physiotherapist will assess how Parkinson's affects your movement, whether you're newly diagnosed, or you've had the condition for some time. This means they can help to keep up your fitness levels, and maintain good posture and balance as your condition progresses. This will help you remain independent.

You may feel that your mobility is very good and that you are exercising without any problems. But a physiotherapist can also help you maintain your mobility to help avoid any future issues.

Your physiotherapist should form part of your support network, involving your family and carers, in helping you manage your Parkinson's. Seeing a physiotherapist can have a number of benefits for people with Parkinson's and their carers. These are outlined below.

### **Improving or maintaining fitness**

Exercise is good for you and it's particularly good for you if you have Parkinson's.

Emerging evidence suggests that increasing exercise to 2.5 hours a week can slow the progression of Parkinson's symptoms. The activity you do can suit you and your condition. An intensive group exercise class could help manage mild symptoms or chair-based exercises at home could target complex issues.

A physiotherapist with expertise in Parkinson's can give you advice and support about what will help you. They could give you an exercise programme to follow at home if you prefer to exercise alone. Or, they may give you advice on sports you can do, like golf, or an exercise class you could join, like yoga or tai chi.

They can show you how to stretch and exercise to keep your joints and muscles flexible too. This will help relieve stiffness and slowness, and help you move more smoothly.

As well as helping with your symptoms, exercise can help with your general health, boosting your circulation and helping prevent heart and lung disease. Exercise can also help you manage stress and fatigue and boost your mood. It can help you sleep well too. The more you can do, the more benefits you'll get. Find out more about the benefits of exercise and the different types to focus on at [parkinsons.org.uk/exercise](https://parkinsons.org.uk/exercise)

### **Helping you stay independent**

People with Parkinson's say certain movements become more difficult as the condition progresses. These include turning in bed, walking, and sitting down and standing up (especially to get into and out of a car). Your physiotherapist can teach you techniques to help make these movements easier.

A physiotherapist or an occupational therapist can also give advice on aids and equipment you could use or alterations you could make to your home to make it easier and safer to move around.

Always check with a therapist before you buy any piece of equipment or assistive device. Parkinson's affects everyone differently, so what might work for one person may not suit another. Equipment may also help your carer. See our last section for more information.

**Find out more:** see our information on daily living equipment for people with Parkinson's, and occupational therapy and Parkinson's.

### **Helping to prevent or manage falls**

Your physiotherapist can work with you on strength and balance training to improve any problems you may have with walking, especially when you're turning.

People who experience freezing, or who are stiffer or weaker, are more at risk of falling. Your physiotherapist can help you improve your confidence and reduce any fear of falling. They can also teach you techniques to help you get down safely on to the floor, and up again if you fall. Often, a physiotherapist will work with an occupational therapist to help you remove any tripping hazards from your home.

**Find out more:** see our information about falls and Parkinson's, and freezing in Parkinson's.

### **Providing pain relief**

Parkinson's can cause different types of pain. A physiotherapist can assess your pain to try to find the cause. Your physiotherapist can use different methods to help ease pain in your muscles and bones (musculoskeletal pain), and from involuntary muscle spasms (dystonic pain). These include manual therapy and stretching, as well as applying heat or cold to the affected area.

Not all pain is related to Parkinson's, and you may have a condition like arthritis, or another injury that needs physiotherapy. So it's important to mention any specific pain apart from your Parkinson's to make sure you get the right support for you.

Many physiotherapists are trained in complementary techniques such as acupuncture, which may also help to reduce pain.

**Find out more:** see our information on pain and Parkinson's.

### **Maintaining or improving effective breathing**

Parkinson's can cause stiffness in your chest muscles and make them weaker. This may lead to chest infections. A physiotherapist can use positioning therapy or other techniques, which focus on your posture, to help clear phlegm and keep your chest clear.

Speech and communication issues in Parkinson's are common and can often relate to your breathing. A physiotherapist can teach you how to strengthen your chest muscles, and provide breathing exercises to improve your breathing pattern and volume. This can also help if your voice has become softer.

If you find that you have specific problems with your voice, a speech and language therapist can help.

**Find out more:** see our information on speech and communication issues and speech and language therapy.

## **What advice can a physiotherapist give carers?**

If you're a carer and help a person with Parkinson's move around, it's important that you get advice from a physiotherapist about caring for your own body, most importantly your back.

A physiotherapist can also give you advice on the best way to help the person you're caring for to move. If the physiotherapist recommends exercises to the person you care for, make sure you understand them. This will mean you can support the person with Parkinson's to get the most out of them.

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 type to use and the best places to put it.

## More information and support

### The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy

The society can help you find a physiotherapist privately if you can't see one on the NHS.

**020 7306 6666**

**csp.org.uk**

### 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 make contact with other health and social care professionals to make sure your needs are met.

The role of the Parkinson's nurse varies. Each will offer different services, aiming to meet local needs. Some nurses are based in the community, whereas others are based in hospital settings.

Many Parkinson's nurses are independent prescribers. This means they can prescribe and make adjustments to medication, so someone with Parkinson's doesn't always need to see their specialist for changes to or queries about their Parkinson's drugs.

Parkinson's nurses may not be available in every area, but your GP or specialist can give you more details on local services.

You can find out more at **[parkinsons.org.uk/nurses](https://parkinsons.org.uk/nurses)**

### Information and support from Parkinson's UK

You can 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)**.

We run a peer support service if you'd like to talk on the phone with someone affected by Parkinson's who has faced similar issues to you. The service is free and confidential – ring the helpline to talk to someone about being matched with a volunteer.

Our helpline can put you in touch with one of our Parkinson's local advisers, who give one-to-one information and support to anyone affected by Parkinson's. They can also provide links to local groups and services.

We have a self-management programme for people with Parkinson's, partners and carers. It is an opportunity to reflect on life with the condition, learn about self-management and think about the future. To find out if there is a group near you, visit **[parkinsons.org.uk/selfmanagement](https://parkinsons.org.uk/selfmanagement)**

Our website **[parkinsons.org.uk](https://parkinsons.org.uk)** has a lot of information about Parkinson's and everyday life with the condition. You can also find details of your local support team and your nearest local group meeting at **[parkinsons.org.uk/localtoyou](https://parkinsons.org.uk/localtoyou)**

Visit **[parkinsons.org.uk/forum](https://parkinsons.org.uk/forum)** to chat to other people with similar experiences on our online discussion forum.

## **Thank you**

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

**Bhanu Ramaswamy, Independent Physiotherapy Consultant**

**Melanie Falk, Neuro-physiotherapist, South Bristol Community Hospital**

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

## **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 **0800 138 6593** or visit our website at **[parkinsons.org.uk/donate](https://parkinsons.org.uk/donate)**. Thank you.

## **Our information**

All of our most up-to-date information is available at **[parkinsons.org.uk/information-support](https://parkinsons.org.uk/information-support)**. If you'd prefer to read one of our printed leaflets or booklets, find out how to place an order at **[parkinsons.org.uk/ordering-resources](https://parkinsons.org.uk/ordering-resources)** or by calling **0300 123 3689**.

We make every effort to ensure that our services provide current, unbiased and accurate information. We hope that this will add to any professional advice you receive and 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.

If you'd like to find out more about how we put our information together, including references and the sources of evidence we use, please contact us at **[publications@parkinsons.org.uk](mailto:publications@parkinsons.org.uk)**

## Physiotherapy and Parkinson's (FS42/2018)

Do you have any feedback about this information? Your comments will help us ensure our resources are as useful and easy to understand as possible. Please return to **Information Content team, Parkinson's UK, 215 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 1EJ**, or email [publications@parkinsons.org.uk](mailto:publications@parkinsons.org.uk). Thank you!

### 1. Please choose the option that best fits you.

- I have Parkinson's and was diagnosed in   I care for someone with Parkinson's  
 I have a friend or family member with Parkinson's  I'm a professional working with people with Parkinson's  
 Other (please specify)
- 

### 2. Where did you get this information from?

- GP  Specialist  Parkinson's nurse  Parkinson's UK local group  Parkinson's UK local adviser  
 Ordered directly from us  Call to the helpline  
 Other (please specify)
- 

### 3. Has it answered all your questions?

- Yes, completely  Yes, mostly  Not sure  Partly  Not at all

### 4. How easy was it to understand?

- Very easy  Easy  Not sure  Quite difficult  Very difficult

### 5. Has it helped you manage your condition better, or make choices that have improved your life in some way?

- It helped a lot  It helped a little  No change  It didn't help  It made things worse

### 6. What is your ethnic background?\*

- Asian or Asian British  Black or Black British  Chinese  Mixed  White British  White other  
 Other (please specify)
- 

\*We ask about your ethnicity to ensure our information is reaching a broad range of people. However, this question is optional.

### Want to hear more from us?

- I would like a response to my feedback  I would like to be a member of Parkinson's UK  
 I'm interested in joining the Information review group, to offer feedback on Parkinson's UK information

### If you've answered yes to any of these options, please complete your details below.

Name

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Address

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Email

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Telephone

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How would you prefer us to contact you?  Email  Post  Phone

We will not pass on your details to any other organisation or third party. To find out more, read our privacy policy at [parkinsons.org.uk/termsandconditions](https://parkinsons.org.uk/termsandconditions)

Every hour, two people in the UK are told they have Parkinson's – a brain condition that turns lives upside down, leaving a future full of uncertainty.

Parkinson's UK is here to make sure people have whatever they need to take back control – from information to inspiration.

We want everyone to get the best health and social care. So we bring professionals together to drive improvements that enable people to live life to the full.

Ultimately, we want to end Parkinson's. That's why we inspire and support the international research community to develop life-changing treatments, faster. And we won't stop until we find a cure.

**Together we can bring forward the day when no one fears Parkinson's.**

## **Parkinson's UK**

Free confidential helpline **0808 800 0303**

Monday to Friday 9am–7pm, Saturday 10am–2pm. Interpreting available.

NGT Relay **18001 0808 800 0303** (for use with smart phones, tablets, PCs and other devices).

For more information see **[www.ngts.org.uk](http://www.ngts.org.uk)**

**[hello@parkinsons.org.uk](mailto:hello@parkinsons.org.uk)**

**[parkinsons.org.uk](http://parkinsons.org.uk)**



Last updated September 2018. We review our information within three years.  
Please check our website for the most up-to-date versions of all our information.  
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