

Physiotherapy and Parkinson's

Treatments, therapies and side effects

Find out more about
physiotherapy and
how it can help



Physiotherapy and Parkinson's

People with Parkinson's may find they aren't as physically active as they once were, or have problems with everyday movements like walking or getting in and out of a chair or bed.

This information looks at how physiotherapy can help.

What is a physiotherapist?

A physiotherapist (often called a 'physio') is a healthcare professional who helps keep people moving and able to carry out daily tasks for as long as, and as safely, as possible.

They should form part of your support network who can help you manage your Parkinson's. They will support you alongside other healthcare professionals, such as your Parkinson's nurse or an occupational therapist. This group is often known as a 'multidisciplinary team'.

Physiotherapists who specialise in Parkinson's are experts at seeing small changes in the way you move, even if you're not aware of any changes. Your physiotherapist can give you advice about how to deal with these issues before they become more difficult to manage.

They can also support you with ways to keep physically active and help build, or maintain your fitness levels, through exercise. Some of this activity will be tailored to you and your abilities. Others will be more specific to targeting movement symptoms you may experience with Parkinson's.

Physiotherapists can also help people recover more quickly after an injury or an illness, and prevent future problems.

When should I see a physiotherapist?

It's recommended that you see a physiotherapist who specialises in Parkinson's as early as possible after you've been diagnosed. You should also be offered physiotherapy if you have balance or movement problems.

The Alexander technique is also recommended. The technique teaches you to be more aware of your body, improves posture and helps you move more efficiently. You may be able to access Alexander technique lessons on the NHS in some areas. They are also available privately. You should speak to your physiotherapist or Parkinson's nurse if you would like to learn more. Other techniques, such as Pilates, can also help.

How can a physiotherapist help me?

Whether you're newly diagnosed or you've had Parkinson's for some time, your physiotherapist will assess how Parkinson's affects your movement.

Seeing a physiotherapist who specialises in Parkinson's can help people in different ways. This includes:

Improving or maintaining fitness

You may feel that your movement is good and that you're able to be active without any problems. But research has shown that regular, moderate to vigorous physical activity can help relieve some of the motor symptoms of Parkinson's. A physiotherapist can help you to increase or maintain your physical activity levels. A physiotherapist can also help you maintain your mobility to help avoid any future issues.

They could give you an exercise programme to follow at home. Or, they may recommend an exercise class you could join. There are many different types of classes that can help with movement and mental wellbeing. These include creative dance, pilates, yoga and tai chi. More vigorous physical activity may include cycling, aerobics or Zumba.

To help relieve stiffness and slowness, and help you move more smoothly, your physiotherapist can show you how to stretch and be active. This can keep your joints and muscles flexible.

Your physiotherapist can support you with strategies to keep you motivated. They can also help you keep good posture and balance, which will help you remain independent.

Find out more: see our information about physical activity and exercise.

Helping you stay independent

Some people with Parkinson's may find certain actions more difficult. These include walking, turning in bed, or sitting down and standing up from a chair. Your physiotherapist can teach you ways 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. This can help make it easier and safer for you to move around independently, both at home and while you're out and about.

Always check with an occupational therapist before you buy any aid or piece of equipment. Parkinson's affects everyone differently, so what might work for one person may not suit another.

Find out more: see our information on daily living equipment for 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. This can improve any problems you may have with walking, especially when you're turning.

You may be more likely to fall if you're stiffer or weaker. People who experience freezing are also more at risk of falling. If you experience freezing you may suddenly not be able to move forward for several seconds or minutes. You may also feel like your lower half is stuck, but the top half of your body is still able to move.

Your physiotherapist can show you ways to overcome freezing and reduce your risk of falling. They can also teach you ways to help you get down safely on to the floor, and up again if you do fall.

Often, a physiotherapist will work with an occupational therapist to help you identify any tripping hazards in your home.

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

Providing pain relief

There are different types of pain that can affect people with Parkinson's. This can include musculoskeletal (muscle) pain, which is related to Parkinson's rigidity and reduced movement of the joints. It usually feels like an ache in the neck and back, but any part of the body can be affected.

Dystonia is another type of pain that is common in Parkinson's. It's caused by involuntary muscle contractions and for some people the pain can be severe.

A physiotherapist can assess your pain to try to find the cause. They can use different methods to help ease the pain. These include manual therapy, when your physiotherapist moves parts of your body using their hands, and stretching, as well as applying heat or cold to the affected area.

Not all pain is related to Parkinson's. You may have a condition like arthritis, or another injury that needs physiotherapy. It's important to mention any specific pain to your physiotherapist so you can get the right treatment for your problem.

Some 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 because you breathe less deeply. A physiotherapist can show you ways to 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 give you 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.

How can a physiotherapist help me if my loved one has Parkinson's?

If you help care for or support someone with Parkinson's, a physiotherapist can give you advice on the best way to help them to move. This might be helping them get up from a chair, or managing freezing, for example.

If the physiotherapist recommends exercises for your loved one, make sure you understand how to do the movements properly. This will mean you can support the person with Parkinson's to get the most out of them.

A physiotherapist can recommend equipment you can use at home to help you care for your loved one. They can also give you advice about looking after yourself physically, especially your back.

Where can I find a physiotherapist?

Physiotherapy is available on the NHS or privately.

NHS physiotherapists work in lots of different places. This includes in the community, such as at GP surgeries and care homes, as well as hospitals and outpatient clinics. They can also visit you in your own home. You may also be offered a video appointment.

Your specialist, Parkinson's nurse or GP can refer you for physiotherapy. In some areas, you will be able to self-refer. If you're referred to an NHS service, there may be a waiting list for treatment.

You can also choose to see a physiotherapist privately, 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 in the 'More information and support' section.

Some Parkinson's UK local groups have group sessions led by a physiotherapist. Call our helpline on **0808 800 0303** or see our website **parkinsons.org.uk/localgroups** to find out more.

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 have specialist experience and knowledge of Parkinson's. They can:

- support people coming to terms with their Parkinson's diagnosis
- help people to manage their medication, so they get the best results and fewer side effects
- make referrals to other professionals such as speech and language therapists and physiotherapists

Some nurses are based in the community, such as your GP surgery. Others are based in hospital settings and clinics.

Talk to your GP or specialist for more details on speaking to a Parkinson's nurse.

Parkinson's UK information and support

Whatever your journey with Parkinson's, you're not alone.

From the moment you or someone you care about is diagnosed, we have information and support for you.

Speak to one of our friendly expert advisers, including specialist Parkinson's nurses, care advisers, and benefits and employment advisers. We've got information and advice on all aspects of living with Parkinson's.

Get help managing your diagnosis. Our information packs, webinars, courses and support groups can help you and your loved ones understand your Parkinson's diagnosis and better manage your symptoms.

Read our up to date, reliable health information. Our website, booklets and magazines can help you better understand Parkinson's. They're full of tips and advice on managing your condition and supporting a loved one.

Find ways to get active, stay active and live well with Parkinson's. Whatever your fitness level, we'll help you find the right activities for you.

Connect with other people with Parkinson's, families, friends and carers. Across the UK, in your local area or online. We'll help you meet others who understand what you're going through, because they're going through it too.

Find out more

- Call our helpline on **0808 800 0303** or email **hello@parkinsons.org.uk** to speak to an expert adviser.
- read our information or find support that's local to you.
- Call **0330 124 3250** or visit **parkinsons.org.uk/order-print-booklets** to order free printed information.

Thank you

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

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

Feedback

If you have any comments or feedback about our information, please call **0800 138 6593**, email **feedback@parkinsons.org.uk**, or write to us at Parkinson's UK, 50 Broadway, London, SW1H 0BL.

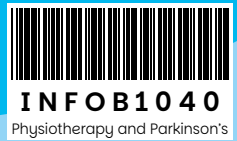
If you'd like to find out more about how we put our information together, or be part of the team that reviews our health content, please contact us at **healthcontent@parkinsons.org.uk** or visit our website at **parkinsons.org.uk/health-content**.

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 Care team on **0800 138 6593** or visit our website at **parkinsons.org.uk/donate**.

Thank you.



We're Parkinson's UK,
the charity that's
here to support every
Parkinson's journey.
Every step of the way.

Free confidential helpline **0808 800 0303**
Monday to Friday 9am to 6pm,
Saturday 10am to 2pm (interpreting available)
Relay UK **18001 0808 800 0303** (for textphone users only)
hello@parkinsons.org.uk | parkinsons.org.uk

Parkinson's UK, 50 Broadway, London SW1H 0DB



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