



# Living Well With Parkinson's Disease

## 10 Things You Can Do Now!

### So, You've Been Diagnosed With Parkinson's Disease — Now What?

Parkinson's disease (PD) is a progressive neurological disorder, yet most people with PD can live well for many years with a good care management plan. While no therapy has been proven to be “neuroprotective” or “disease modifying,” there is strong evidence that people with PD can improve their quality of life by taking immediate steps to strengthen their bodies and minds. Keep a positive attitude and get started with these 10 steps you can take right now!

#### 1. Partner With Your Doctors

Your doctor may prescribe one or more drugs to treat your symptoms. It's important to follow your doctor's instructions carefully, but also recognize that people respond to anti-Parkinson's drugs differently. Do your own research on the classes of drugs available and be prepared to discuss the risks and rewards of each option with your doctor. In some people, the risks of potential side effects may outweigh the benefits. Your doctor needs your input to find the right combination of medicines for you. They will also need to know which symptoms are troublesome for you, when you experience them, and how they respond to treatments. APDA has a [Symptom Tracker App](#) that can be easily downloaded from the App Store or Google Play to help you manage this information.

#### 2. Assemble a Team

Your care team will not just include doctors and nurses. It will also include other health professionals—such as speech, physical, and occupational therapists, and social workers—that can help you live better with PD. Many people with PD find that these therapies give them symptom relief, ease pain, and enhance their lives. Physical therapists work to strengthen motor skills such as walking and balance and can structure an effective exercise plan for you. Occupational therapists design ways for you to perform daily activities, such as

dressing and meal preparation, more easily. Speech therapists help you communicate as effectively as possible, and social workers provide emotional support, practical resources, and guidance to help you navigate the challenges of living with PD. Even early in your disease, these therapists can establish a baseline for observation. Your neurologist should be able to provide recommendations for therapy and, if needed, a referral.

#### 3. Exercise, Exercise, Exercise

While the precise role exercise plays in delaying the progression of the disease and its symptoms is still being researched, studies consistently report that people with PD who exercise regularly do better than those who do not. Many experts recommend regular, appropriately challenging exercise outside of your normal comfort zone for maximum benefit, but studies also show benefits from less intense activities like walking, tango dancing, and tai chi. As always, consult your doctor before beginning any exercise program. APDA sponsors many free or low-cost community exercise classes. Visit our website at [apdaparkinson.org](http://apdaparkinson.org) to find a program near you.

#### 4. Eat Right

Most experts agree that a healthy diet with plenty of water is important. Evidence suggests that a Mediterranean or MIND diet offers particular benefits for brain health. These diets are characterized

by an emphasis on plant-based foods, including vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, and nuts; moderate amounts of low-fat proteins such as chicken and fish; and fats centered around olive oil. Healthy eating can also help keep your bones strong, decreasing the likelihood of a fracture if you fall, and can help relieve constipation, which is common with PD. Some people with PD find that certain foods, specifically foods containing protein, interfere with their PD medication absorption. Your doctor can help determine if this is an issue for you, and if it is, instruct you on how to manage it.

## 5. Sleep

We all know how critical a good night's sleep is to our health and well-being. However, for those with PD, sleep becomes even more important, as adequate sleep supports brain and overall health. Sleep disorders are common in PD, so it's important to get your rest whenever you can.

## 6. Consider Alternative Approaches

Alternative and complementary approaches to treating PD can include yoga, tai chi, meditation, or massage. Consult with your doctors before beginning any course of therapy. Avoid practitioners who claim to "cure" PD, and any who advise abruptly stopping or weaning off prescription medications (unless you have first spoken with your physician).

## 7. Sign Up for Clinical Trials

Scientific research is key to understanding PD, developing better treatments, slowing disease progression, and ultimately finding a cure. By participating in clinical trials, you play a more active role in your own healthcare and can gain access to new PD treatments before they become widely available. Many clinical trials for potentially valuable new therapies and treatments are developed at great cost but are delayed because of a shortage of willing participants. If you are interested in clinical trials, your doctors can help you make an informed decision. To find out more about clinical trials

in general, and those related specifically to Parkinson's disease, visit [www.clinicaltrials.gov](http://www.clinicaltrials.gov).

## 8. Become an Advocate

You become a PD advocate whenever you are involved in activities intended to improve the lives of people living with PD. Whether you choose to raise awareness, fundraise, donate, volunteer, or find your own unique way of lending support, the work of every PD advocate strengthens the voice of the entire PD community.

## 9. Join a Support Group

APDA offers many programs for people with PD, caregivers, and family members. These programs help families with day-to-day issues, provide a forum for discussing PD, and serve as a place to make new friends who share similar experiences. For many people with PD, their support group is a gateway into the world of PD advocacy, education, and services available in the community. Online support groups are now more readily available, allowing more people to access this resource.

To find an APDA support group in your area, please visit our website at [apdaparkinson.org](http://apdaparkinson.org).

If you are in an area that does not have a support group, contact us and we will help you get the support you need.

## 10. Plan for the Future

PD may require you to plan for the costs of medication, home adaptations, insurance, and other healthcare-related needs. You may also have employment concerns, especially as symptoms progress. Financial planning information and tools are available online and from professionals such as financial and estate planners, elder law attorneys, and disability consultants. Social workers can also help connect you to these resources, assist with accessing benefits, and support you in developing a plan that meets your individual and family needs, helping to reduce stress and improve quality of life.

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