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## Beyond Medication in Managing Your Parkinson's Disease

If you've received a diagnosis of Parkinson's disease, you'll need to work closely with your doctor to find a treatment plan that offers you the greatest relief from symptoms with the fewest side effects. Certain lifestyle changes may also help make living with Parkinson's disease easier.

### Healthy Eating and Hydration

Eat a nutritionally balanced diet that contains plenty of fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Eating foods high in fiber and drinking an adequate amount of fluids can help prevent constipation that is common in Parkinson's disease. A balanced diet also provides nutrients, such as omega-3 fatty acids, that may be beneficial for people with Parkinson's disease. It is important to stay well hydrated to prevent decreased performance and drop in blood pressure with standing (orthostatic hypotension).

### Exercise

Exercising may increase your muscle strength, flexibility and balance. Exercise can also improve your well-being and reduce depression or anxiety. It is important to **develop the habit of exercising** and to put it on your schedule. It will help to do exercise that you enjoy; if possible have a partner to accompany you with your exercise program. Try exercises such as walking, swimming, dancing, water aerobics or stretching. Yoga and Tai Chi can also be beneficial for you. When doing stretching exercises, I prefer that dynamic stretches be done along with gentle passive stretching.

Exercises that improve your balance can help prevent falls. Remember that automatic movements are affected by PD, so you have to think when you move. Cues to make big movements will help; try humming or counting when you move. If standing balance is affected, try doing exercises while sitting. Listening to music during your exercise program can help with developing more fluid movement.

With walking, remember to not move too quickly. If you notice yourself shuffling, stop and check your posture, and attempt to stand up straight. Look in front of you, not directly down, while walking. Avoiding falls is critical, so practice the following:

- Make a U-turn instead of pivoting your body over your feet.
- Keep your center of gravity over your feet without leaning or reaching.
- Avoid carrying things while you walk.
- Avoid walking backward.
- Avoid clutter in the home.

## Daily Living Activities

Daily living activities — such as dressing, eating, bathing and writing — can be difficult for people with Parkinson's disease. An occupational therapist can show you techniques that make daily life easier; clothing modifications and adaptive aids can also help. Time your activities to dosing of your medication to be able to function optimally and think energy conservation to avoid excessive fatigue.

## Speech and Voice

Being understood by others is important. If you have speech difficulties, learn how to separate your words and think LOUD when you talk. A speech and language therapist can help you with this and can address swallowing issues if this is a problem for you. As with physical exercise, a habit of practice is very important.

## What Else

The Mayo Clinic offers other types of management techniques that may help those with PD:

- **Massage.** Massage therapy can reduce muscle tension and promote relaxation.
- **Acupuncture.** During an acupuncture session, a trained practitioner inserts tiny needles into many specific points on your body, which may reduce your pain.
- **Tai chi.** An ancient form of Chinese exercise, tai chi employs slow, flowing motions that may improve flexibility, balance and muscle strength. Tai chi may also prevent falls. Several forms of tai chi are tailored for people of any age or physical condition. A study showed tai chi may improve the balance of people with mild to moderate Parkinson's disease more than stretching and resistance training.
- **Yoga.** In yoga, gentle stretching movements and poses may increase your flexibility and balance. You may modify most poses to fit your physical abilities.
- **Alexander technique.** This technique — which focuses on muscle posture, balance and thinking about how you use muscles — may reduce muscle tension and pain.
- **Meditation.** In meditation, you quietly reflect and focus your mind on an idea or image. Meditation may reduce stress and pain and improve your sense of well-being.
- **Music or art therapy.** Music or art therapy may help you to relax. Music therapy helps some people with Parkinson's disease to improve their walking and speech. Participating in art therapy, such as painting or ceramics, may improve your fine motor skills and strength and help you express your emotions.
- **Pet therapy.** Having a dog or cat may increase your flexibility and movement and improve your emotional health.

## Final Thoughts

- Keep good nutrition and hydration.
- Set up a routine for exercises and stick to a schedule - develop the habit of exercise.
- Do activities that are enjoyable.
- Save energy and use adaptive equipment.

- Think BIG when you move and LOUD when you talk.
- It's not all about medication - a Rehabilitation assessment can help you in managing your Parkinson's disease. Periodic rehab therapies (physical, occupational and speech/language) can make a big difference in how well you function.

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