

FACT SHEET



SPECIAL
INTEREST
GROUP

Physical Therapy and Parkinson's Disease

Author: Lisa Brown PT, DPT, NCS

Parkinson's Disease

Parkinson's Disease (PD) is caused by the loss of a brain chemical called dopamine that helps to control movement. The first symptoms are usually tremors (shaking movements), muscle stiffness, slowness of movement, walking with smaller steps and less arm swing, and problems with using the hands. Over time these symptoms can lead to:

- a slouched posture,
- pain especially at the neck, back, and shoulders,
- balance problems and falls,
- problems doing simple tasks like moving in bed and getting up from a chair,
- fatigue.

There are several medications that can treat the symptoms of Parkinson's disease. In addition, physical therapy and exercise can help people with PD to manage symptoms.

How Can Physical Therapy (PT) Help?

Physical therapists (PTs) can help people with PD to have better posture, balance, walking, and general well-being. These improvements are possible at any and all stages of Parkinson's disease.

During the early stage of the disease, PTs can improve the health and wellness of people with PD by:

- teaching an exercise program including **aerobic exercise** such as walking or riding a stationary bicycle to improve fitness and reduce tiredness, **stretching and range of motion exercises** to keep muscles from getting tight, **strengthening exercises** for muscles that are important for good posture and keeping the body steady, and **balance exercises**.



1111 North Fairfax Street
Alexandria, VA 22314-1488

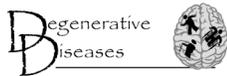
Phone: 800-999-2782,
Ext 3237

Fax: 703-706-8578

Email: neuro@apta.org

www.neuropt.org

Parkinson's Disease



SPECIAL
INTEREST
GROUP

At the middle stage, PTs provide valuable advice about:

- exercises to improve balance and prevent falls,
- how to overcome “freezing” episodes when a person is not able to start or continue doing a task,
- using various cues like lines on the floor or music to improve walking,
- equipment such as canes and wheeled walkers to help one move around safely,
- making the home safe by reducing clutter or throw rugs that might make a person trip and fall.

To help people with PD in the late stage be as active as possible, PTs can:

- teach caregivers how to safely help with daily activities,
- teach caregivers how to do positioning and exercises that keep muscles loose and prevent breathing problems and pressure sores.



American Physical Therapy Association
The Science of Healing. The Art of Caring.

1111 North Fairfax Street
Alexandria, VA 22314-1488

Phone: 800-999-2782,
Ext 3237

Fax: 703-706-8578

Email: neuropt@apta.org
www.neuropt.org