

GUIDE TO OVERCOMING EXERCISE BARRIERS IN PARKINSON'S

2024

Practical recommendations
for some of the most common
barriers to exercising for
people with Parkinson's

Advice developed by neuro
physiotherapist Josefa Domingos



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WELCOME MESSAGE



Josefa Domingos
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We've developed this guide to overcoming barriers to exercise in Parkinson's as part of our Parkinson's Summer of Sport 2024 campaign.

As President of Parkinson's Europe and a neuro physiotherapist who has spent over two decades working exclusively with people with Parkinson's, I've found that exercise barriers can be grouped into three main areas: **health, personal, and environmental.**

Whether you're a person with Parkinson's, caregiver or healthcare professional, this guide will give you practical tips to overcoming these barriers .

I hope you find it useful.

**Scan this QR code for
more information
about Parkinson's
sport and exercise:**



Photo: ITF Foundation, Germany

EXERCISE BARRIERS: HEALTH

In Parkinson's, both movement-related or "motor" symptoms (e.g rigidity and balance) and non-motor symptoms (e.g anxiety and fatigue) can affect your ability to exercise consistently, or even begin at all. Both seeking professional help and listening to your body will help get you moving.

ASK THE EXPERTS

- Consult a Parkinson's specialist about how symptoms can influence exercise habits - they can help you learn ways to bypass this.
- If you feel a specific symptom is not allowing you to exercise, discuss this with your doctor and adjust your Parkinson's medication if needed.
- Consider working with a therapist or counsellor to address anxiety, depression, or apathy. Managing these issues can help increase motivation for exercise.

GETTING STARTED

- Begin with small, manageable exercise goals. Choose something you like and believe will help you, like a 10-minute walk (to improve gait) or mobility exercises in a chair (to improve back pain). Gradually increase intensity, duration, and complexity as your confidence and endurance grow.
- Create a regular exercise routine at the same time each day, if possible. Consistency helps build habits, reducing the need for daily motivation and decisions (i.e "should I exercise or not today?")

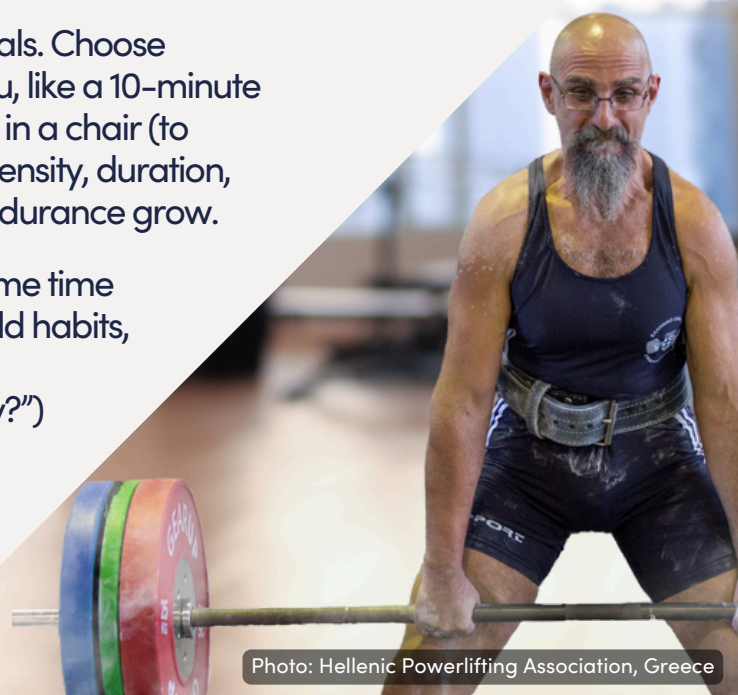


Photo: Hellenic Powerlifting Association, Greece

GETTING STARTED (CONTINUED)

- Seek social support by joining exercise classes for people with Parkinson's that guarantee safety and efficacy. Social interaction can also be motivating and provide accountability.
- Exercise when you feel well and your medication is having a good effect.
- Adjust your exercise routine if you happen to be working out and your medication is not working as usual.
- Rewarding yourself for meeting exercise goals can be great motivator and help you keep up the habit.
- Once you gain habits and motivation, mix different types of exercise to keep the routine engaging and prevent boredom. Variety is important to challenge your comfort zone and access new learnings.
- Adjust your exercise according to your fatigue level. On days when fatigue is an issue, opt for lower-intensity activities like gentle Pilates, yoga, or walking. On days with more energy, increase intensity or duration, focusing on aerobic exercise forms like swimming, cycling or dance.
- Ensure adequate rest and recovery to avoid excessive fatigue, injury and discomfort. It's important to listen to your body and avoid overexertion.



Photo: Parkinson's UK

EXERCISE BARRIERS: PERSONAL FACTORS

Whether it's current fears or confidence levels, past exercise experience levels or external lifestyle issues like time constraints, there are many personal factors that can have an impact on your ability to exercise with Parkinson's. Here are some tips to overcome these barriers.

LOW SELF-CONFIDENCE (INCLUDING FEAR OF FALLING)

- Keeping a daily record of achievements, no matter how small, in a diary or app can help boost motivation by providing visual progress tracking.
- Get an exercise buddy, such as a friend or family member. This can make exercise more enjoyable, and less intimidating or fearful.

PHYSICAL DISCOMFORT

- Listen to music you like during workouts to make the experience more enjoyable and distract from discomfort or fatigue.
- Be prepared to adjust or modify your exercise routine according to your training progression, daily cognitive and mental status, and personal and physical needs.



LACK OF PREVIOUS EXERCISE EXPERIENCE

- Consult with an expert Parkinson's professional to receive a personalised exercise plan that will help you build confidence and start on the right track.
- Get practical education about the benefits of exercise and how to keep safe.
- Choose an exercise that you like but that also has benefits for your current physical and cognitive ability. Exercise you really enjoy can help with depressive moods (you almost forget your Parkinson's!) and are more likely to maintain your interest, whereas exercises that have a very specific, personal goal can help your motivation (for instance, walking to improve your gait will help you get out and about more often).

LACK OF TIME

- Make exercise a daily habit. It can be helpful to schedule specific times in your week to prioritise physical activity and make it a consistent part of your routine.
- Get all the necessary equipment prepared in advance (e.g lay your exercise clothes out the night before a morning aerobics class), so you have everything you need at hand when you want to start exercising.
- Break the exercise into shorter sessions throughout the day. Three 10-minute sessions adds up to a solid 30 minutes of exercise, and 1-minute intensive "exercise snacking" throughout the day has been shown to be equally beneficial.
- Focus on being consistent, even if the workouts are short or low-intensity. Regular activity has cumulative benefits.
- Make exercise a part of daily life by integrating it into tasks like gardening, cleaning, or walking the dog, or planning activities with friends and family like hiking or biking.

Photo: Climb On, Young Parkies Portugal

EXERCISE BARRIERS: ENVIRONMENT

Sometimes, it's the simple act of getting to an exercise class that puts up a barrier, from poor transport links and bad weather to a lack of classes available nearby. Elsewhere, the social aspect - or lack thereof - can put people off, as can finding an exercise that aligns with your cultural norms.

LOCATION, ACCESS & PEER SUPPORT

- Online exercise videos or virtual classes designed for people with Parkinson's gives you a range of options, while reducing the need for transportation and reliance on a care partner. It's also a more private option if you don't like the idea of group activities, allowing you to exercise at home while following a structured program.
- If you're lacking social support, join a Parkinson's group to find an exercise buddy.

CULTURAL CHALLENGES

- Consider trying out exercise styles that align with your cultural values and traditions, like traditional dance or martial arts.
- In some cultures, mixed-gender exercise may be challenging. Ask therapists if it's possible to offer separate classes or activities for men and women to respect cultural norms.
- Online exercise classes may offer multilingual options like subtitles to allow for more diverse participation.
- Class providers should recognise that cultures evolve over time, and be open to adapting their offering based on current needs.



Photo: Ian O'Brien, Ireland

TIPS FOR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS

Variety is crucial

Create and adapt exercises to make them more enjoyable, and avoid excessive repetition to keep things fresh and interesting.

Have fun!

People notice when you are not there mentally – be present and enjoy your sessions.

Get care partners involved

Allow care partners to participate in classes, but don't allow them to overcorrect when they do, which makes the experience less optimal for everyone (gently remind them that "one instructor is enough"!).

Stay positive

Avoid overcorrecting, and focus on positive periodic reinforcement. Notice when something positive happens, e.g "You're walking much better today."

GET IN TOUCH

We hope you've found this guide useful.

You'll find lots more helpful resources on the Sports & Exercise page of our website.

To be the first to hear about Parkinson's-related opportunities, from knowledge-building webinars to events, surveys and other activities, join our Engagement Network.

Or to receive regular Parkinson's news, stories and updates straight to your inbox, sign up to our newsletter.

Scan the QR codes for more information.

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Sports & Exercise page



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