

In Touch Newsletter September 2025

How to take the stress out of gardening with Parkinson's

Gardening can be a form of therapeutic exercise. Tasks such as digging, weeding and planting can improve or maintain your:

- Flexibility
- Strength
- Coordination
- Dexterity
- Balance
- Heart health

Being in the garden can stimulate your senses, with the bright colours of flowers and the earthy smell of the soil helping you relax and feel less stressed. Taking care of plants and seeing them grow can give you a sense of accomplishment and purpose, which is good for your self-esteem and mental resilience.

Gardening also helps you focus on the here and now, offering you a break from the stress and worries that can come with Parkinson's. Gardening in the sunlight helps your body make vitamin D and can improve your mood, making you feel better overall.

The challenges

You may find that your Parkinson's symptoms have taken away some of your interest in gardening, and that it now feels like more of a chore rather than something you enjoy.

Parkinson's affects people in different ways. But some of the most common symptoms can affect your ability to safely and efficiently carry out certain tasks.

- A tremor can make it hard to do precise jobs like planting seeds or cutting plants carefully.
- Stiff muscles can make it harder to bend over, kneel down, or stretch out to reach things.
- Issues with balance and coordination can increase your risk of falls and injury while moving around garden paths or handling tools.
- Fatigue can limit how long you can do gardening for in one session.
- If you have problems with thinking or memory, or find it hard to plan or stay organised, you might struggle to keep up with taking care of a garden.
- Apathy may mean you put off tasks longer than you usually would, resulting in more work when you do feel up to getting into the garden.

Other, non-Parkinson's related problems like arthritis, back pain, or breathing issues can also make it harder to garden. However, there are different adaptations and changes you can make to help you garden safely and easily.

Choose the right tools

- Pick tools with easy-to-hold handles and made of light materials to help reduce stress on your joints and muscles.
- Lightweight and 'self-propelling' lawn mowers can make mowing easier and less tiring.
- If you're able to, use padded kneeler cushions with side handles to help you kneel down and stand up without hurting yourself.
- Sitting on a stool or bench can also help you avoid having to kneel or squat. If you get one that lets you change the height, you can adjust it for different jobs in the garden.
- Use a wheelbarrow or trolley to transport items that are heavy or awkward to carry.

Adapt your environment

- Growing plants in raised beds or containers can make gardening easier because you won't have to bend down or kneel as much.
- Putting in handrails can help you stay steady and safe, especially if you often feel unsteady on your feet.
- Choose plants and shrubs that are low maintenance and slow growing. You may want to consider artificial grass or paving in certain areas.
- Keep garden paths clear to avoid tripping over anything.
- Fix any loose or uneven paving, and avoid using gravel, which can be difficult to walk on, particularly if you use a walking aid.

Plan and prioritise

- Break tasks into smaller, more manageable steps and take frequent breaks to help prevent fatigue.
- On days you plan to garden, try not to schedule any other hard tasks for that day or the next day.
- Arrange your garden in a simple way to make gardening tasks easier and less confusing.

Sources:

Original article by Emma Bracher, Occupational Therapist

[Parkinson's UK](#)

Stay Steady - Exercises for Postural Instability

You've probably heard how important exercise is. But let's talk about exercise for one specific challenge: postural instability.

That feeling of being unsteady, having trouble with balance, or the risk of falls are among the biggest challenges for those living with Parkinson's. Fortunately, the right types of exercise can really make a difference.

Here's a list of exercise styles that have been shown to help improve balance and reduce the risk of falls in people with Parkinson's:

Tai Chi: The Slow, Powerful Flow

Think slow-motion martial arts. Tai Chi focuses on weight shifting, body awareness, and smooth transitions. Studies have found it's especially effective for improving balance and preventing falls in people with Parkinson's.

It works to improve your balance by enhancing proprioception (your sense of body position) and strengthens your postural muscles through low-impact movement.

Boxing and/or Dancing

Both have been shown to improve balance, gait, and even mood, as most people find it fun to do. Boxing and dancing combine rhythm, movement coordination, weight changes that challenge balance and social interaction—all things that stimulate the brain and body together.

Yoga: Stretch, Strength and Stillness

Yoga incorporates stretching, strength and stillness and isn't just about flexibility. It helps with posture, core strength, and focus, all of which play a part in better balance. Chair yoga and gentle yoga are great options if mobility is more limited. Yoga improves your balance by improving core stability and postural alignment, making it easier to stay upright and move confidently.

Resistance or Strength Training

Building strength in the legs and core helps support better posture and control. Weight training, resistance bands, or even bodyweight exercises like squats can all help. Stronger muscles provide better support and control for posture and movement control.

Physiotherapists trained in Parkinson's-specific exercise programs such as LSVT BIG, PWR! Moves or PD Warrior focus on issues such as balance and posture issues as they are designed and aimed at improving Parkinson's symptoms. They focus on tailored exercises that focus on big, deliberate movements help reset posture and improve coordination.

Exercising and staying active with Parkinson's isn't just about not falling over, it's about maintaining independence, confidence, and quality of life. And while no single exercise is a magic fix, combining different types, such as Tai Chi for balance, yoga for core strength, and dance or boxing for coordination, can create a powerful, rounded balance routine.

References:

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/22316445/> "Tai Chi and postural stability in patients with Parkinson's disease

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/19479161/> "Effects of dance on movement control in Parkinson's disease: a comparison of Argentine tango and American ballroom." *Journal*
<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8275425/> "The Effects of Yoga on Patients with Parkinson's Disease: A Meta-Analysis of Randomized Controlled Trials"
<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/23536417/> "A two-year randomized controlled trial of progressive resistance exercise for Parkinson's disease."

My Parkinson's Family

By Madeleine Pizzuti

Our eyes met momentarily as we stretched our arms out wide clutching the coloured bands in front of us, whilst counting backwards from three. Again and again our eyes would meet as if it were meant to be part of the exercise.

Already I was out of breath, and this was only the first exercise of the designated hour-long program. It was my 'look forward to' exercise twice a week – an hour each time.

I had never liked exercise, yet here I was at the age of 70 enjoying every minute of it. I had no option really – this was essential if I were to maintain some normality in my life.

"Are you OK Maddy?" the instructor's voice brought me back to the present moment. The name 'Maddy' would have annoyed me years ago, but now, in my senior years I seemed to be more accepting of variations to my name.

"Yes, I'm OK thanks." I replied, bringing myself back to the task at hand.

"Good. We're now going to do our stretches."

The instructor's voice seemed to fade into the distance as I was brought back to those eyes again. It was hard to look elsewhere as we were sitting directly opposite each other with other participants around us forming a circle.

As our eyes met again, I wondered about this person. His past: his occupation when he was younger; his family; had he been married; did he have children?

He glanced at me again. What might he be thinking of me? Probably he's saying to himself, *"she doesn't look like she's got it. I've watched her walk, and she seems quite balanced. She doesn't shake. She's not even as old as me."*

Whatever *he* was thinking, or come to think of it, what *I* was thinking, the reality was that we both suffered the same demise.

I dropped down into my chair whilst letting out a deep sigh and waited for the instructor to direct us to our first exercise station. The staff and students at the

Exercise Lifestyle Clinic had been fantastic. Their demeanour exhibited care and support. They all seemed genuinely interested in each participant.

This was the one place in my now 'changed' world where I felt accepted and cared for. My safe haven. A place where each participant bore an invisible label on their chest that read 'I have Parkinson's.'

I remember vividly the day I received my diagnosis. It was April 2021.

The first sign of the disease was a tremor in my left hand, and I was referred to a neurologist who sent me for the necessary tests. It was the day I was to receive the test results, and as I sat in the patient chair opposite the doctor waiting for some words of reassurance, my eyes scanned the wall behind him that displayed his framed qualifications and a large photo of a younger version of himself with what seemed to be his medical colleagues.

On his extremely neat desk sat a 3D dissected model of a brain. I watched the doctor as he stared at his computer screen, carefully guiding his hand over the computer mouse. Then he spoke these words "Well, it's all pointing to Parkinson's Disease."

It took me a few seconds to process his words. I had expected a less significant diagnosis – one which could be fixed with medication of some sort.

However, all I could think of was... 'can I live with this?' I answered his statement with '...isn't that life-threatening?' He replied, 'well we all have to die someday.'

I froze at his apathetic response. I knew nothing about Parkinson's disease apart from the fact that Michael J Fox had it. I had never given any thought (before that day) to the disease. However, that was soon to change.

After being prescribed some medication for the tremor, I set to investigating as much as possible the effect of Parkinson's and how to live with it. We are fortunate to be living in a country that offers excellent support for Parkinson's sufferers.

I discovered that Parkinson's is not just about tremors, and that there are numerous symptoms that may present themselves. Some of which are age-related issues and not brought on by Parkinson's Disease. One of the first things I did after receiving my diagnosis was to read Michael J Fox's book *No Time Like the Future*.

This was a stepping stone towards my own future and how it might change. The book gave me hope and the realization that I was not alone in this. I could identify with so much of what Michael J Fox had to say. At last here was someone who understood, who acknowledged that the symptoms I experienced were not just a figment of my imagination.

After much research I joined a support group and received counselling through Parkinson's NSW.

The mere ability to talk with someone who understood what I was experiencing was invaluable and so important for my mental health. I had learnt that exercise was one of the most important activities to undertake and was known to slow the progress of the disease. Hence my enrolment in this exercise program. Yes, I have had to make some changes in my daily life.

Whenever I have to drive anywhere – especially somewhere I haven't been before – I try to find out beforehand if parking is close and hopefully on the same side of the road to where I'm going (this eliminates me having to cross the road), and if there are any steps or flights of stairs.

If I'm going to a large shopping centre, I make sure I use my walker to assist with balance and with the fact that I might need to rest after walking for a while. I also tend to walk with a slight stoop and more slowly. Then there is the issue of fatigue.

There is no warning of when that might strike. But I've learnt to just accept it and not fight it. If I need to rest and sleep some of the day, then I do.

The crazy thing about Parkinson's disease is that a lot of the symptoms are not visible to the outsider. They are feelings from within – the effort it takes to merely put one foot in front of the other, and the simple things that we once took for granted but we're now not able to do, such as rolling over in bed or getting up from an armchair.

Thankfully though, with the aid of these exercise classes I know that I am doing something positive towards making my life as normal as it can be.

We've finished the 'winding down' part of the class now and the instructors and staff are ready to wish us all a good week until next time. I look up towards the man opposite who now smiles at me and waves goodbye.

I grab my water bottle and wave to everyone, grateful for the support and encouragement that I've been given.

Until next time bless them all – my Parkinson's family.

How to Live Better with Parkinson's Day by Day

While there is currently no cure for Parkinson's, there are various strategies and daily actions that can significantly improve your quality of life living with the condition.

Many people do not get regular access to neurological care and so self-management in between appointments becomes even more important. Here we explore the importance of taking new actions every day to live better with Parkinson's. By making small changes and incorporating new habits into your daily routine, you can enhance your physical, emotional, and mental well-being.

Prioritise Medication Management

Adhering to your prescribed medication schedule is crucial when living with Parkinson's. Set up a daily medication regimen and use pill organisers to ensure you take your medications as prescribed. Consistent medication management can help control symptoms and maintain a better quality of life.

Exercise Regularly

Exercise is one of the most effective ways to manage Parkinson's symptoms. Engaging in regular physical activity can improve balance, flexibility, strength, and coordination. Consider incorporating activities like walking, swimming, yoga, or Tai Chi into your daily routine. These exercises not only help with motor function but also contribute to an overall sense of well-being.

Maintain a Balanced Diet

Eating a nutritious and balanced diet can have a positive impact on your energy levels and overall health. Consult with a registered dietitian to create a meal plan tailored to your specific needs. A diet rich in fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, healthy fats and whole grains can provide essential nutrients and support your well-being.

Foster a Supportive Network

Building a strong support system is essential when managing your Parkinson's. Connect with friends, family, support groups, and healthcare professionals who understand your condition. Sharing your experiences and seeking emotional support can alleviate feelings of isolation and provide valuable insights into coping with Parkinson's.

Explore Mindfulness and Relaxation Techniques

Stress and anxiety can exacerbate Parkinson's symptoms. Incorporating mindfulness and relaxation techniques into your daily routine can help manage these emotions. Practices like meditation, deep breathing exercises, and progressive muscle relaxation can provide a sense of calm and reduce stress levels.

Pursue Cognitive Stimulation

Engaging in mental exercises can help maintain cognitive function and mental sharpness. Consider puzzles, reading, or learning a new skill. Staying mentally active is essential for overall well-being and can also enhance your daily life with Parkinson's.

Adapt Your Living Environment

Modifying your living space to accommodate your needs can make a significant difference in daily life with Parkinson's. Make your home safer by removing obstacles and using non-slip/trip flooring. These adjustments can reduce the risk of falls and enhance your mobility.

Embrace Occupational, Physical and Speech Therapy

Occupational, physical and speech therapy can help improve daily functioning and mobility. Work with experienced therapists who can create personalized exercise and rehabilitation programs. These therapies can empower you to maintain your independence and enhance your daily life.

Set Realistic Goals

Setting achievable goals, both short-term and long-term, can provide motivation and a sense of accomplishment. Break larger goals into smaller, manageable steps to prevent feeling overwhelmed. Celebrate your successes along the way to stay motivated.

Living with Parkinson's disease presents unique challenges, but by taking new actions every day, you can significantly improve your quality of life.

Remember that it's okay to seek help, lean on your support network, and adapt your routines as needed. Each day brings opportunities for growth and resilience. By incorporating exercise, mindfulness, support, and other positive habits into your daily life, you can live better with Parkinson's and continue to find joy and purpose in each day.

Source:

[My Moves Matter](#)

Potential Parkinson's Treatment Shows Promising Results

A small new trial published in the journal *Nature Medicine* describes what would be two firsts for Parkinson's disease – a diagnostic test and a potential immune-based treatment that works similarly to a vaccine.

The research is still early, but researchers are excited by the prospect of advances for a disease that lacks good diagnostics and treatments.

The target of both innovations is alpha synuclein, a protein that takes an abnormal form in Parkinson's patients – aggregating in their brains and destroying nerve cells involved in motor and some cognitive functions. While researchers have long known that these proteins are involved in the disease, finding ways to measure and target them has not been easy.

Potential vaccine

The Florida-based biotech company Vaxxinity developed a vaccine (or what it calls an active immune medicine) to train the immune system to attack only abnormal versions of the alpha synuclein protein – which are improperly folded – and not the regular forms. This would essentially help people's bodies treat themselves.

“The idea is that patients should recognise their own misfolded proteins, and it is personalised because their own immune systems are doing the work,” said Dr. Mark

Frasier, Chief Scientific Officer at the Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research, which funded the testing part of the study.

New diagnostic test

The new diagnostic test for Parkinson's – which was developed by researchers at University of Texas and Vaxxinity – uses samples of cerebrospinal fluid to measure a person's levels of abnormal alpha synuclein. If the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) grants it full approval, it will become the first test for diagnosing Parkinson's.

“Without such a test, you're kind of shooting in the dark,” said Mei Mei Hu, CEO and co-founder of Vaxxinity.

Alpha synuclein has been tricky to measure in the body for several reasons, says Dr. Mark Frasier. While everyone has the protein, abnormal forms of it occur in relatively small amounts, so they're harder to detect via imaging.

This type of alpha synuclein also tends to clump *inside* cells rather than outside of them, making it even harder to see. If clumps are large enough to become detectable, they can look structurally similar to amyloid or tau – the proteins implicated in Alzheimer's disease – so imaging tests might misdiagnose people with Alzheimer's rather than Parkinson's.

The test overcomes those hurdles by cleverly exploiting normal forms of the protein.

Parkinson's experts believe that tiny amounts of abnormal alpha synuclein circulate in the spinal fluid of patients but are too small to be detected through imaging.

To run the new test in the study, researchers take normal forms of the protein in the lab and add them to samples of spinal fluid from patients; that prompts any misfolded protein that might be present in the samples to pull the normal proteins into misfolded aggregates, amplifying the signal for the abnormal form.

Scientists then use a fluorescent probe to detect how much antibody to the misfolded protein patients generated, resulting in a biomarker, or stand-in for the treatment effect.

This test would be a critical advance because it makes it possible to identify patients with abnormal alpha synuclein at the earliest stages of the disease, when treatments might be more effective.

With more data from patients, researchers hope to further refine what different levels mean, so that the test will be able to tell not just if a person has Parkinson's but whether someone might be at a greater risk of developing it.

Currently the test is only used in research studies, but more results like these – as well as data on whether the same process can be applied to blood samples – could speed the test to getting approved for wider use.

What the study found

The trial – conducted by researchers at the University of Texas, the Mayo Clinic, the Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research, and Vaxxinity – included 20 people with Parkinson's.

It was just designed to test the safety of the approach, so the study only provided hints about the treatment's effectiveness. Everyone received three shots over nearly a year; some contained the treatment at different doses, and some contained a placebo.

Overall, people receiving the vaccine generated more antibodies against the abnormal alpha synuclein protein than those vaccinated with placebo, as measured by the Parkinson's test. Antibodies started to ramp up about four months after the vaccinations began.

“What is unique about our technology is that it can stimulate the immune system to produce very, very specific antibodies against toxic forms of alpha synuclein, and do it in a safe way, which is reassuring,” said Jean-Cosme Dodart, senior vice president of research at Vaxxinity and senior author of the paper.

According to the test results, about half of the patients in the trial showed high levels of antibodies against the misfolded alpha synuclein, and most of these patients received the highest dose of the vaccine. They also scored the highest on motor and cognitive tests.

There were too few patients to adequately assess any changes of Parkinson's symptoms, but the researchers believe that longer follow-up with those tests, and potentially more frequent or higher doses of the vaccine, could lead to improvements in those scores.

“The results are very, very encouraging,” said Dodart.

Sources:

[Nature Medicine](#)

[Time](#) magazine

James Frizelle Charitable Foundation awards grant to Parkinson's NSW

Parkinson's NSW has been awarded a grant by the James Frizelle Charitable Foundation to help underwrite the cost of co-funding a Parkinson's Specialist Nurse with the Northern NSW Local Health District.

The grant is \$20,000 for partial funding of the role of Parkinson's Specialist Nurse Rebecca Manners who is based at Ballina Hospital.

“We are particularly grateful for this grant from the James Frizelle Charitable Foundation because it arrived at a time of great uncertainty around the continuation of Local Health District co-funding for this role. Happily, the continuity of the Local Health District support has since been confirmed and the grant will greatly assist Parkinson’s NSW in funding its half of the Parkinson’s nurse role – ensuring continuity of care for the Northern NSW Parkinson’s community,” said Mary Kay Walker, CEO of Parkinson’s NSW.

The objectives of the James Frizelle Charitable Foundation include bringing lasting change to the lives of people in the Gold Coast and Northern NSW regions, working with other established charitable organisations which require financial support, and underwriting community health initiatives.

Take 5

A monthly review of the top five issues raised in calls to the Parkinson’s NSW InfoLine team (call 1800 727 567).

1. What to Do When You First Receive Your Diagnosis

Receiving a Parkinson’s diagnosis can feel overwhelming, but taking early steps can make a big difference in managing your health and wellbeing. One of the most important things you can do is see a Movement Disorder Neurologist. These specialists have advanced training and experience in Parkinson’s, which means they can provide a more accurate diagnosis, tailored treatment plans, and access to the latest therapies.

Parkinson’s NSW is here to guide you from day one, helping you understand your options, connect with support services, and build a strong care network. Our InfoLine is a great first step for information and reassurance.

2. Sialorrhea (Drooling)

Drooling is a common and sometimes embarrassing symptom of Parkinson’s, but it can be managed. It’s usually caused by slower swallowing rather than producing too much saliva. Small changes can make a big difference:

- Practice swallowing techniques taught by a speech therapist
- Sit upright and slightly tilt your head forward to help with saliva control
- Carry tissues or a discreet handkerchief for comfort
- Speak to your neurologist about treatment options that can reduce drooling

Our InfoLine team can connect you with experienced speech therapists and practical resources to help you manage this symptom with confidence.

3. Communicating with Aged Care Staff and Accessing Services at Home

Whether you're receiving support in a residential setting or through services at home, having open and respectful communication with providers helps ensure you get the care you need.

Tips for navigating aged care services:

- Keep a written list of your needs and questions for discussions with providers
- Bring a support person to appointments or care meetings
- If you're not satisfied with your service, you can change providers at any time

Contact Parkinson's NSW for advice on planning and choosing services that fit your goals.

4. Chronic Pain – Recognising Rigidity and Stiffness as Pain

Chronic pain is common in Parkinson's but often overlooked because muscle rigidity and stiffness may not be described as traditional pain. These symptoms can significantly affect mobility, sleep, and emotional wellbeing.

Managing pain involves a combination of approaches:

- Physiotherapy and gentle stretching exercises to maintain flexibility
- Tailored exercise programs designed for Parkinson's to reduce muscle tightness
- Medication adjustments by your neurologist to ease discomfort
- Pain management specialists who understand Parkinson's and can suggest additional therapies

Acknowledging this pain is the first step in getting effective support. Our InfoLine can connect you with physiotherapists, specialists, and programs that can help reduce pain and improve quality of life.

5. Preparing for Your Movement Disorder Neurologist Appointment

Making the most of each visit to your neurologist ensures you receive the best care.

Preparing ahead can help you feel confident and supported:

- Keep a symptom diary to track changes and medication effects
- Bring a support person who can help ask questions and take notes
- Prepare a list of questions such as:
 - Are my medications still the best fit for me?
 - Are there ways to manage side effects?
 - Am I ready to explore advanced therapies like DBS?
 - What referrals can support my speech, mobility, or mental wellbeing?

Being proactive during appointments helps your neurologist create a treatment plan that supports your best quality of life.

For information or personalised guidance on any of these topics, please contact the Parkinson's NSW InfoLine on (02) 8051 1900. We're here to support you every step of the way.

For evidence-based information and advice call the Parkinson's NSW InfoLine

(02) 8051 1900

Parkinson's NSW InfoLine

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