

# Stress Management for Parkinson's Disease



It is not uncommon for the stresses of daily life — feeling overwhelmed, under prepared and over stimulated — to cause anxiety and unrest. These psychological issues can impact your health and even exacerbate the symptoms of Parkinson's disease (PD). That is why it is important to assess what may be causing stress and learn how to deal with the situations that give rise to anxiety. Meditation, yoga or Tai Chi and deep breathing can help restore a sense of calm. Whether you are living with Parkinson's or caring for someone with PD, finding balance can help you cope with the daily stresses of life. This may mean limiting your exposure to environmental stressors or using complementary therapies. Such approaches are wonderful ways to lower anxiety, lower blood pressure and improve your all-around health.

## Managing Stress

Identify stress triggers along with ways to help control your emotions and release anger in a safe way. Try writing in a journal or going for a walk when tension reaches a breaking point. Physical outlets, such as hitting a pillow, can help you vent frustration. If stress triggers are unavoidable, you need reliable ways to reduce and manage them. No method is too silly if it works.

## Yoga or Tai Chi

Tai Chi is a moving meditation based on the circulation of "chi," life's energy force, believed by the ancient Chinese to be blocked in the presence of disease. It is comprised of continuous, flowing movements. Yoga, which originated in ancient India, can include holding stationary poses or moving into a flowing series of poses and aims to integrate the mind, body and spirit. Both can help with relaxation, which can help with PD symptoms. Additional benefits include:

- Increased awareness of movement and actions
- Better awareness of proper body alignment/posture and enhanced flexibility
- Improved balance and core strength, which help to reduce fall risk
- Improved breath support and control

## Breathing Exercises

Breathing exercises offer a simple and effective way to relax in moments of stress or anxiety. When you are stressed your body goes into a high state of physical arousal. You may notice muscle tension, a faster heart beat or shallow breathing.

### 3-minute Relaxation Routine

- ✓ **Select a key word such as relax, calm or peace**
- ✓ **Concentrate on relaxing using your key word. Pay attention to your breathing. Take in one deep breath and hold it.**
- ✓ **While holding your breath, tense up a group of muscles, such as the muscles in your face, arms or legs.**
- ✓ **As you breathe out, relax the tense muscles and let go. Continue using your key word as you drop your shoulders.**
- ✓ **Repeat, alternating to different muscle groups, for 3 minutes.**

## Consider Massage Therapy

Many people with PD recognize the benefits of massage. Massages are available in a variety of settings, including many local malls. Specific benefits may include:

- reduction in rigidity and tremor
- improvement in sleep
- increase in daily stamina
- reduction in anxiety
- increased feeling of relaxation

In finding a massage therapist, it is important to find someone trained by an accredited school of massage therapy. Tell your medical team, family or friends that you are considering getting a massage. They may be able to provide you with a referral. You can also find a massage therapist by calling toll free 1-888-843-2682 or visiting the American Massage Therapy Association website: [www.amtamassage.org/findamassage/](http://www.amtamassage.org/findamassage/).

## Distinguishing Between Stress and Anxiety or Depression

Feeling stressed or worried is understandable when managing a chronic illness. It is important to remember that depression and anxiety play a key role in PD and its effect on quality of life. If constant worry or nervousness go beyond what is manageable, a person may be experiencing anxiety, which is more serious.

Remember, anxiety and depression often go together. Symptoms of anxiety can include:

- feelings of panic
- fear and restlessness
- sleep disturbance
- poor concentration
- palpitations
- shortness of breath
- irritability
- dizziness.

Symptoms of depression can include:

- excessive worrying
- persistent sadness
- crying
- loss of interest in usual activities and hobbies
- increased fatigue and lack of energy
- feelings of guilt
- loss of motivation
- complaints of aches and pains
- feelings of being a burden to loved ones

If you think your stress may be a symptom of depression or anxiety, do not feel embarrassed to seek professional help or counseling. A social worker, psychologist or psychiatrist can help you pinpoint the causes of your distress and provide constructive ways to cope with the situation.

You may find Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), a non-drug approach to developing the skills and actions that change patterns of thought and behavior related to depression, to be a helpful tool.

**Your mood is a critical aspect of living with PD that you can control. Talk to your friends, family and doctor about your feelings of stress, anxiety or depression.**

**For more resources on managing stress, anxiety or depression, call the Parkinson's Foundation Helpline at 1-800-4PD-INFO (473-4636).**