

Nonpharmacologic Approaches

Treatment Options



Nonpharmacologic (as with pharmacologic and surgical) approaches will not cure Parkinson disease. That said, they are helpful in maintaining and potentially improving the overall quality of life and well-being of people with Parkinson's. The approach or approaches you undertake depends on the challenges and or symptoms you are experiencing. Nonpharmacologic approaches include:

Physiotherapy

A physiotherapist/physical therapist can be a vital resource to help maintain mobility and balance and prevent and manage pain. They assess, diagnose and treat difficulties with movement and daily function by prescribing therapeutic exercise and customized plans to improve mobility for daily life.¹

Occupational therapy

With occupational therapy problems in the areas of self-care, work and leisure are addressed. An occupational therapist provides advice and instruction on adaptive equipment, safety awareness, energy conservation and mobility issues. They also assess home situations and can provide appropriate guidance on adaptive equipment and home adaptations.¹

Speech/voice therapy

Speech and voice issues are common occurrences for people with Parkinson's. Speech-Language Pathologists (SLP) are a high calibre resource that can help with speech and voice issues (as well as swallowing issues).

Mental and/or emotional support

The impact of Parkinson's is multidimensional, affecting not only the individual diagnosed, but their loved ones. Effects vary from person to person and with a range that often includes one or more of the following: progressing physical limitations, depression, anxiety, increased stress, emotional problems, a decline in confidence, and changes to social life/status and issues relating to family dynamics. Accessing appropriate support when needed from a

licensed therapist, clergy member, client services coordinator or even a family member or friend is vital to maintaining good mental and emotional health.

Exercise

Research indicates that regular exercise may improve many aspects of the physical decline of Parkinson's such as gait, balance, tremor, flexibility, and motor coordination. And, it's not just the physical, motor symptoms of Parkinson's that benefit from exercise. Studies also show that regular exercise reduces stress, anxiety and feelings of depression. Exercise can also have a positive effect on cognitive, sleep and constipation issues.

Cognitive training

Research indicates people with Parkinson's (as well as care partners/aging adults in general) may benefit from incorporating a cognitive component into their healthy living plan/goals. For example: engaging in challenging cognitive tasks (puzzles, reading, memory games, etc) can help protect against age-related declines in thinking. It should be noted however that "the starting point for a cognitive training, training strategy and training frequency is unknown and currently under investigation."²

Education

Education contributes to health and well-being by equipping people with knowledge and skills for problem solving, and helps provide a sense of control and mastery over life circumstances. And it improves people's ability to access and understand information to help keep them healthy.

References

¹ Parkinson Association of Alberta. PD Health Care Team. 2013-12.

² Witt K, Kalbe E, Erasmí R, Ebersbach G. Nonpharmacological treatment procedures for Parkinson's disease. *Nervenarzt*. 2017 Apr;88(4):383-390. doi: 10.1007/s00115-017-0298-y.