

Stress and Parkinson's Disease

Stress comes in many shapes and sizes, but we all have it. For people with Parkinson's disease (PD), stress can bring on or worsen symptoms. It might increase tremor or bring on a freezing episode (a sudden, temporary inability to move). Here are a few tips to help lessen stress and defuse tense situations:

1. Breathe.

Mindfulness meditation, which includes breathing and other relaxation techniques, may lower stress and boost mood. Research is limited, but preliminary work links mindfulness to decreased motor symptoms, improved quality of life and even brain changes in areas affected by PD.

2. Recognize your stressors.

You can't find a way around your stress unless you know what's causing it. For many, work and home responsibilities are sources of stress. Try to identify what specifically is overwhelming or upsetting you. For some people, it's workload. For others, it's giving presentations or interacting with certain co-workers.

3. Ask for help.

You don't have to shoulder stress on your own. Depending on what your stressors are, whether you have possible solutions and how comfortable you feel, you might talk directly to colleagues or family members. Or you could talk with your doctor or a therapist.

4. Focus on the positive.

When feeling stressed, it's easy to concentrate on problems. Try to surround yourself with people who lift your spirits, and make time for hobbies you enjoy. You also may consider listening to music that inspires you.

5. Exercise regularly.

Physical activity boosts release of brain chemicals called endorphins, which give a natural sense of well-being. Although many forms of exercise are beneficial in Parkinson's, yoga and tai chi incorporate meditation and deep breathing, and may be helpful to manage everyday stresses.

5. Get enough sleep.

While we sleep, researchers believe we store memories and rejuvenate our bodies. Adults need seven to nine hours each night for these critical processes. Sleep problems can be a part of Parkinson's, but exercising regularly and winding down an hour before bed may help.



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