

From the article "[Speaker Takes on Parkinson's Disease](#)," which appear in Bend, Oregon's Nugget Newspaper on 5/11/2010:

### **Best Exercise for Parkinson's Disease**

Sue Scott, MS, presented information on effective exercise choices for people with Parkinson's disease, May 17 at the Sisters Library. About 30 people attended, including several with recent diagnosis.

Scott shared that Parkinson's disease is a progressive neurological disorder that primarily affects motor skills. Skills particularly affected are agility, coordination and the ability to multi-task. Problems with falls and cardiovascular disease are very common with PD. Exercise can be very effective against both outcomes. Exercise also improves motor function, agility, gait speed, stride length, strength, attitude and depression; and in many cases reduces the amount of medication necessary

Scott suggests that to make your exercise regimen more effective for fall prevention, choose or design personal obstacle courses. You can make these agility/coordination challenges in your own home or out of doors. Include obstacles or activities that you are confident you can easily manage, but are beginning to have trouble with. Move through doorways, pick up something from floor, change speed, go around corners, through dim rooms. As you perfect some of these skills, try to do them more rhythmically. Providing these kinds of activities in your work out keeps your brain and body clicking together and increases neuro-plasticity and may help delay PD progression.

If you enjoy cardiovascular exercises, Scott recommends that you keep it up. Cardiovascular exercises, aerobics, walking, swimming, biking (the whole central Oregon lifestyle, after all!) is not only good for your heart and lungs, it's also shown to be neuro-protective in many randomized controlled trials. To make cardiovascular exercise even more effective, try to choose activities that require more balance. An elliptical instead of a recumbent bike for example. Also, add some rhythm to the activities. Walk with a cadence from the alphabet song, or to music. Believe it or not, it helps if you're the one singing. Self initiation is key to preserving how our brains function on the own. And the symmetry of the rhythm will help your gait be smoother too.

If strength training is a favorite choice of yours, then Scott recommends focusing on extensor muscle groups. Those are the anti-gravity muscles – anything that would help push you up from a squat to a standing or leaping position. If you can, choose whole body exercises, like lunges with BIG arm swings. Scott says exaggeration helps make the moves bigger. Big is good with PD; because small weak movement is the often the norm for individuals with PD.

Tai chi is also helpful for PD. The awareness of breath and movement and the relaxation and focus of it all does wonders for working balance and self awareness.

Overall, Scott says the best exercise is the one you'll do. She hopes her suggestions will help people with PD make their programs more effective fighting off the effects of PD. If you have questions, Scott suggests you work with a qualified trainer or physical therapist, at least to start. Specifically ask about a program called HELP PD from Oregon Health & Science University, designed by Fay Horak, PhD,PT.

The event was organized by local businessman, Len Graterri who would like to help organize a PD support group in Sisters. If you are interested in a support group, please contact Len at (email or phone) or visit and talk with him Fri-Sun at (business name) Outlaw at (address).

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