

Can exercise help people with Parkinson's disease?

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Immunohistochemistry for alpha-synuclein showing positive staining (brown) of an intraneural Lewy-body in the Substantia nigra in Parkinson's disease. Credit: Wikipedia

Exercise may help people with Parkinson's disease improve their

balance, ability to move around and quality of life, even if it does not reduce their risk of falling, according to a new study published in the December 31, 2014, online issue of *Neurology*, the medical journal of the American Academy of Neurology.

For the study, 231 people with Parkinson's disease either received their usual care or took part in an exercise program of 40 to 60 minutes of balance and leg strengthening exercises three times a week for six months. This minimally-supervised exercise program was prescribed and monitored by a physical therapist with participants performing most of the exercise at home. On average, 13 percent of the exercise sessions were supervised by a physical therapist.

Falling is a common problem for people with Parkinson's, with 60 percent [falling](#) each year and two-thirds of those falling repeatedly. "The resulting injuries, pain, limitations of activity and fear of falling again can really affect people's health and well-being," said study author Colleen G. Canning, PhD, of the University of Sydney in Australia.

Compared to those in the control group, the number of falls by participants who exercised was reduced in those with less severe Parkinson's disease, but not in those with more severe disease. For those with less severe disease a 70 percent reduction in falls was reported in those who exercised compared to those who did not.

"These results suggest that minimally supervised exercise programs aimed at reducing falls in people with Parkinson's should be started early in the disease process," Canning said.

Overall, those who took part in the [exercise program](#) performed better on tests of ability to move around and balance, had a lower fear of falls and reported better overall mood and quality of life.

Provided by American Academy of Neurology

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