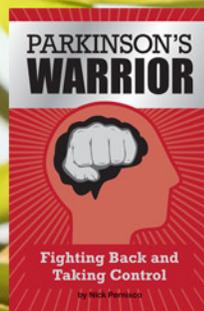


# ***Parkinson's***

# ***Wellness***

# ***Tips***



***By the author of  
Parkinson's Warrior***

## Parkinson's Wellness Tips

Parkinson's Wellness Tips

By Nick Pernisco

Author of Parkinson's Warrior

<http://www.parkinsonswarrior.com>

[http://www.parkinsonswarrior.com/](http://www.parkinsonswarrior.com)

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## Preface

First things first - I'm not a doctor nor a lawyer, I don't pretend to be a doctor or a lawyer, and I don't play one on TV (or YouTube). What I *am* is a well-informed, engaged Person with Parkinson's (PWP). My intent is to provide you with information and inspiration to help guide you through your Parkinson's journey. While you will learn all about Parkinson's, and you will be able to speak the "lingo" intelligently with your doctors, your family, and your friends, this is not a medical book, per se. This is one Person with Parkinson's reaching out to hold the hand of another Person with Parkinson's.

**Always** seek your doctor's advice and follow their instructions before starting any new medication, beginning any exercise routine, or changing anything about your routine. In these pages, you will find interesting ideas, both scientifically proven and anecdotal, that you may want to go out and try right away. My advice is to first talk about each new idea with your medical team and get their input before deciding on a change. My hope is that you

will find out about new therapy ideas, learn the basics about how these therapies work, research them further on your own, then be informed enough to have a true discussion with your team – one in which there is a back and forth of ideas, not one which your doctor says “take this and call me in a month.” A good doctor will always welcome your input, and a great doctor will admit when they don’t know enough about a topic and will be open to continue learning.

## Introduction

When I was first diagnosed with Parkinson's disease at age 33, I was devastated. Everything in life that I had planned for myself suddenly disappeared and in the middle of a budding career as a college professor, I had to rethink everything about my life. After a long period of depression, I decided I would not allow Parkinson's to rule my life. I would not be defined by Parkinson's.

I turned my life around by developing a Warrior Mentality, a way of thinking about Parkinson's, and more importantly, a way of responding to it, that would forever change my life. I wrote a book about it, [Parkinson's Warrior: Fighting Back and Taking Control](#), with the goal of sharing my knowledge with others inflicted with this cruel illness.

Let's be clear: there is no cure for Parkinson's. Anyone who tells you there is one is lying to you. But that doesn't mean you need to suffer for the rest of your life. My premise is that, since you will not die from Parkinson's,

you might as well make the most of your life and live your best life today. You can be happy. You can be otherwise healthy. You can keep depression and anxiety at bay. I truly believe this, and that's why I've written this short guide, with tips taken from my book, to start showing you the way.

If you enjoy these tips and find them useful, I hope you will check out my book on Amazon. It contains hundreds of pages of suggestions, information, and plenty of inspiration.

Finally, if you have any questions about anything Parkinson's-related, or just need someone with whom to commiserate, feel free to reach out: [nick@parkinsonswarrior.com](mailto:nick@parkinsonswarrior.com). I read every piece of email I get and I'm happy to chat with you.

## Physical Wellness: Yoga

If I could pick only one type of exercise for the rest of my life as someone with Parkinson's, I'd choose yoga. When some people think about yoga, they probably think about spirituality, the Indian origins of the practice, and perhaps think that yoga is something new-agey and weird. Although perhaps this may have been true years ago, today yoga is a common practice around the world and is perhaps the most effective physical exercise for treating Parkinson's.

The reason that yoga is so great for Parkinson's, is that the practice includes something for mind, body, and soul. The physical moves in yoga promote physical well-being. After a one-hour session of yoga, you will feel like you have worked your entire body, but not in an intense way like when using a treadmill or lifting weights. The best way I can describe yoga to someone who has never done it, is that it feels like getting a massage from the inside out. After a yoga session, my body feels relaxed and loose, and

I notice improved movement and an overall feeling of well-being for the rest of the day.

A good yoga class will include some meditation, either at the beginning or at the end of the class (or ideally, both), and this serves to get your mind in line with your body. Breathing also comes into play, in which we focus on our breathing and try to align the breath with our body movements. It feels amazing when you get yourself into a flow!

Start out slowly. If you have never done yoga before, start with a beginner's class, or if you can't stand for too long, try chair yoga instead. Tell the instructor from the beginning that you have Parkinson's, and they will usually help guide you through modified exercises throughout the class. Only do what you are able to. Never feel bad for being slower than the rest of the class, or for not being able to do the yoga power moves. You are not competing with anyone.

## Physical Wellness: Walking

Walking helps strengthen leg muscles, helps improve balance, and certainly provides a cardiovascular workout. Not only that, but it also helps clear your mind, especially if you can find a natural setting in which to walk. Walking is more appropriate for those who can't ride bikes, or for those who would like to slow things down for their fitness. Walking is generally low impact, and there can be a benefit even walking very slowly.

One of the reasons walking is so useful for balance is that walking helps train the small muscles in the bottom of the feet with each step taken. This benefit is increased by walking on uneven surfaces like an open field or on the beach rather than on a flat sidewalk. With every step, the small muscles on the bottom of your feet expand and contract, making them stronger. Once you take your shoes off at home, you will immediately notice a difference in your balance and in how you step. You will still have the poor balance from Parkinson's, but now your feet have strong muscles to help compensate for that poor balance.

My recommendation would be to buy a good quality pair of walking shoes. Preferably, go to a shop where they can test your gait, figure out how your foot is pronated, learn about your foot arch, and find shoes that will be a perfect fit for your feet. This will reduce the chances of tripping and falling, and will also make sure you have a smooth walk. If you have trouble walking or have extreme balance issues, I recommend walking with the assistance of a cane or walker.

## Physical Wellness: What Works for You?

Ultimately, physical fitness is a personal activity. You should do whatever comes naturally to you, and whatever makes you feel good. Remember, everybody is affected by the disease differently, so you may not be able or willing to participate in walking or dancing or cycling. That's okay. I have a friend who plays pool several times a week. Perhaps that activity doesn't get your heart racing like aerobic exercise, but he still stretches his body as he lines up the shots, and he must also exercise his cognition when deciding what shots to take. It works for him. Another friend plays golf weekly – it's another low impact exercise, but it involves walking from hole to hole, and using the whole body to swing at the ball. He may not get the best scores, but he is out there moving his body and having a good time. I also have several friends who enjoy swimming. They're not using the diving board, and certainly don't swim in the deep end, but they are moving their bodies freely in the water, and the water's resistance makes for a great workout.

My advice is to do whatever works for you. If you hate lifting weights and can't stand jogging or walking with no destination in mind, you are less likely to continue doing it in the long term. Instead, if you pick an activity that you enjoy and that brings happiness to your life, you're more likely to stick with it. Your doctors will certainly ask you what kind of fitness you do each week. I get a kick out of telling them that I play pinball and arcade games, then explain to them the benefits and seeing them realize that these really are physical activities. This also broadens their minds, which may lead to them suggesting these activities to other PWP's as well. In fact, one person told me that their neurologist had suggested for her to play pinball because another patient of hers does it. The PWP responded, "oh, that's Nick Pernisco!" That brought a smile to my face.

## Emotional Wellness: Meditation

The one activity I have found to be most helpful, likely because it can be done at any time, is meditation, with the intention of releasing negative emotions. I could meditate when my meds are “on” and I’m having wild dyskinesia, or when I’m completely “off” with tremors and stiffness. In either case, I can close my eyes and meditate. Many associate meditation with spiritual experiences, but it doesn’t have to be. Meditation is the technique of freeing your mind of all thoughts and just being. This helps calm the mind and body and helps to reduce symptoms and side effects to a certain degree.

Here’s how I meditate: wherever I am, I try to sit or lay down if I can. Then I close my eyes and focus on the sound of my breath. I shut out every sound and every movement outside my body and my surroundings – I simply focus on the sound of my breathing. It often helps me to put a hand over my sternum so I can also feel the up and down movements of my chest as my breath goes in and out. I focus on my breathing, then purposely try to

slow my breathing to a breath (full inhale and exhale) every 5 to 7 seconds. Since I'm focusing on my breath, I'm ignoring everything else that's around me. Suddenly my body becomes calm, and I feel like I'm just floating in space. After a quick meditation session of 5 to 10 minutes, I have the sensation of being refreshed and I feel clarity and calmness in my mind. If I meditate for 30 to 60 minutes, I may be able to regain some energy to do more activities that day.

## Emotional Wellness: Stay Positive

One of the biggest determining factors for how your body reacts to Parkinson's is your mood. Being grumpy and having a bad mood plays into the severity of symptoms. This is why it's very important to stay positive. If your mood is up and you are thinking positive thoughts, your body will follow. Many times, staying positive is easier said than done.

Sometimes it may be easy to get down, like when you meet someone in advanced stages at a support group meeting. It's hard not to think of yourself being in that person's condition sometime down the line. But this is the wrong way to look at the situation. You have this moment right now to live your life. Go out there and live it. When we live in the now and practice mindfulness – stopping to smell the roses, as they say – it's much easier to stay positive.

Staying positive also has another benefit: the people around you will see your positivity and will respond

with positivity. Some people may also recognize your positive attitude in light of your struggles and see you as an inspiration. We tend to think that once we are stricken with some serious condition our usefulness has disappeared, but nothing could be further from the truth. The joy you bring to the world when you are sick is so powerful. Be thankful for the life you have now, as well as for the people you have around you. You will live a longer, better life in every respect.

## Cognitive Wellness: Keep Learning

Let's say that you have just taken early retirement from the job that you have been at for 30 years, or you're in your mid-30s or mid-40s and Parkinson's has become too much of a burden for you to work regular hours at your regular job. Or let's say that you're in your 60s or 70s, and feel like your mind is not active enough and you would like to do more to exercise your cognition. This is the perfect time to learn a new skill that can help you to improve your career prospects, or just to improve your life. Going back to school to retrain for a remote working environment, or simply learning a new language, can help you find new fulfillment in your life no matter what stage you are in.

If you decide that Parkinson's has become too much for you to hold a full-time regular office job, it may be time to retrain yourself in something that you can do from home and on your own time schedule. For me that was learning computer science. I enrolled in an online computer science program – the entire degree can be

completed online, and once I graduate I can work remotely from home. I can offer my services on Upwork and work on my own time schedule and when I feel well enough, or I could work as an employee for a company that allows me to work from home. I could also use my skills to create my own software products. Finally, computer programming offers me the mental challenge I'm so in need of after leaving my in-person teaching career. The new skill you acquire may be different than mine since it should be interesting to you. Perhaps you've always been very good with words, so maybe you take a writing workshop to learn how to write articles for blogs or online magazines. I know several people that work from home writing articles for online publications.

Perhaps you are not interested in retraining in a new area, but you simply would like to keep your mind active. One of the best ways I know of to keep your mind active is to learn a new language. Learning a new language has been shown to help create new connections between neurons in your brain. Even into our later years of life, our brain remains moldable and neurons are still being created. You can learn a new language at home from your

smart phone or computer using software like Duolingo, or you can go to language classes at community centers or junior colleges. This is also a great way to meet new people and feel like you are still a part of society. Learning a new language also has the obvious benefit of gaining the ability to communicate with an entirely new group of people and to experience different cultures. Imagine yourself learning Chinese, Hindi, or French, each of which is spoken natively by over a billion people around the world!

## Cognitive Wellness: Memory Games

One of the most common declines in cognitive fitness with Parkinson's is with short-term and long-term memory. This usually happens due to the disease itself, but can also be exacerbated by certain medications like dopamine agonists. Carbidopa-levodopa can actually improve short-term memory. This improvement can be experienced by taking a memory test while unmedicated in the morning, and then repeating the test later in the afternoon when you feel your medications are at their peak. You will notice an improvement in memory and you'll find that you are retaining more information. Learning new things can be difficult for PWDs, so it can be useful to coordinate learning with when your medications are at their most effective.

A great way to contribute to your cognitive wellness is to play games that require you to use your memory. By simply searching online for "memory games" you will come across hundreds of websites that offer free memory training or memory-enhancing games. My

favorite of these types of games is so called “pair matching” games. The idea is simple: lay out sixteen or more cards face down, then turn two over at the same time in an attempt to match pairs. You probably remember this game from when you were a child; well, it’s back! Not only does the game help work your memory, it also helps with spatial cognition, which is another thing we all lose as we get older.

## General Wellness: Fitness Tracking

As with everything related to Parkinson's, it's important to track your fitness on a regular basis to note any changes, positive or negative. You can use my Parkinson's LifeKit app, a spreadsheet, or even just a small journal.

The Parkinson's LifeKit app allows you to test your daily physical, cognitive, and emotional fitness by administering a number of specialized tests and then storing the result. This allows you to review your own results, either through easy-to-understand graphs, or through the raw data. It also allows you to print out a – one-sheet summary of all your tests for your doctor.

Alternatively, you can use a paper journal to keep track of any kind of marker that works for you. How many steps you walk per day for example, or how you feel, on a scale of 1 to 10, before and after doing a few sets of weights with dumbbells. Track this information over time so that you get an idea of where your health is headed. For

example, if you notice that over the span of six months your number of steps per day has trended downwards, you will have objective data that you could bring to your neurologist to discuss. This analysis may help determine if you need to make changes to your medication or make some other change to your routine.

Ultimately, it's a matter of "you can't fix what you don't know is broken." If you having a "feeling" that something isn't right, how do you know for sure unless you have been keeping track?

## General Wellness: Medical Marijuana

With new laws allowing the use of medical and recreational marijuana throughout the United States and around the world, the use of marijuana as a treatment for Parkinson's has gotten a lot of attention lately. Unfortunately, since it's so new and since there isn't enough research available as of yet, there are a lot of misunderstandings about what medical marijuana is, and how it can help with the symptoms of Parkinson's disease. I have had some experience in the research of medical marijuana, and for the sake of completeness, I want offer some views, some colloquial experience results, and point you towards research currently being done in the field.

If you are fortunate enough to live in a state or country that allows the use of medical marijuana, I highly recommend speaking to a naturopathic doctor about your options. The doctor can recommend the use of marijuana for treating Parkinson's, suggest what specific varieties or brand names to look for, and can also help adjust your diet and exercise routine as well. In my state of Washington,

where both medical and recreational marijuana are legal, I was able to visit a naturopath who gave me advice on what to use for Parkinson's symptoms. I was surprised how professional the dispensaries and products appeared. In Washington State, Marijuana is highly regulated, so each product is tested for purity, level of THC or CBD, and quality. The packaging of each product clearly states strain, varietal, percentage of THC and/or CBD, date of harvest, and much more. This is a much different experience than in Amsterdam, where I think even the people selling the marijuana don't know exactly what they're selling. It's important to find reputable vendors, just as you would when selecting supplement brands.

## General Wellness: Adopting a Warrior Mentality

“Know thy self, know thy enemy. A thousand battles, a thousand victories.” – Sun Tzu

*Sun Tzu* was a strategist in ancient China, and his famous book, “The Art of War,” is a classic book on winning in warfare. It’s very strange for a pacifist like myself to be so adamant about waging war, but I sincerely believe that to fight Parkinson’s, we must approach it with the mindset that we’re going to war with an enemy. It’s a war we didn’t start, but it’s a war in which we are fighting, whether we like it or not. There is currently no cure, so we’re not talking about winning the war, but instead we’re fighting to keep the illness at bay, and to not give up on ourselves and our way of life. To do this, we must awaken the warrior inside of us. We may not have ever shown the world the fury inside of us, but it’s a fury that our Parkinson’s will know, and that it will soon fear. This war is not easy for any of us, but it’s one in which we must fight.

Parkinson's has met its match: it's you.

In order to make this fight truly fruitful, you must develop three aspects of your mind. First, you must have the *motivation* to succeed. Without motivation, the disease will take over and you won't even be able to begin the fight. Second, you must have the *determination* to succeed. There will be roadblocks and hurdles along the way – you should approach these roadblocks with a “bring it on” attitude. This is not a fight for the faint of heart, but we are already past that. Finally, you must show *perseverance*. There will be setbacks. There will be days you feel awful and won't want to get out of bed. You know this will happen, but you must never give up. It's possible to thrive while having Parkinson's disease, but to do so you must show up to fight the battles and be convinced of your resolve.

Make no mistake, fighting Parkinson's is a long war. It will last a lifetime, it will have its ups and downs, and it may seem never-ending at times. But wars throughout history have lasted a long time, since both sides were determined to win and would not give in to failure. When

we talk about going to war with Parkinson's, we really mean optimizing our lives so that the disease doesn't overcome us, but also that the disease doesn't rule our lives or define who we are. This is a delicate balance to achieve, but it can be done.

## Supplements: Omega-3 Fatty Acid

Omega-3 fatty acids are among some of the best-known substances to help alleviate Parkinson's symptoms naturally. While it's best to get your omega-3 fatty acids from actual fish, buying a well-produced and natural fatty acid supplement with verified ingredients can be just as good as the real thing. Omega-3 fatty acids are capable of crossing the blood-brain barrier, unlike most other supplements and medications, since the body's own defense system stops this from happening. When the fatty acids get into the brain, they can increase blood flow and reduce neural inflammation in the brain. In addition, Omega-3 has been shown to help restore some cognitive dysfunction like memory loss. Omega-3 contains an acid that has been shown to reduce motor symptoms and inflammation in animal models. In your own research, you may find that many of the studies about Omega-3 have been conducted using placebo amounts of EPA, which didn't show significant results. You may want to exclude those studies from your own research and instead focus

on studies that use full-strength Omega-3 acids, like those contained in commercially available capsules.

As mentioned, the best place to get Omega-3 from is from fish. Salmon is the gold standard food, so to speak, when it comes to fatty acid since many of the supplements contain the oil from this fish. Eating salmon once a week is a good start for getting your Omega-3. A reason that supplements are useful here is that Salmon can be expensive to eat more than once a week, and you may also be exposed to toxins that are common in fish due to our polluted oceans. The last thing you want to do is get a negative effect from a natural food that is supposed to be doing good things for you!

## Supplements: Vitamin C

Vitamin C is a powerful antioxidant, and has been used for many years as a way to boost the immune system. It's best to get vitamin C from natural foods like citrus fruits (oranges, grapefruits), but it's possible to get your vitamin C from supplements as well. When possible, and as with all supplements, try to get the vitamin C tablets or capsules that contain the least amount of fillers. The typical dose commonly recommended for a healthy adult is about 1,000mg per day. For people with Parkinson's, I have heard of doctors who recommend taking as much as 3,000mg per day as a form of neuroprotection. As a bonus, vitamin C will help protect against colds.

Antioxidants are useful for those of us with Parkinson's because as we get older, our cells oxidize due to the existence of free radicals. Cellular oxidation, or "oxidative stress" has been known to lead to neurological conditions, chronic fatigue, some forms of cancer, and other nasty ailment. Antioxidants come to the rescue by merging with the oxidative cells and neutralizing them. While

antioxidants perform their work on the whole body, we are especially fortunate that its work includes the brain. Does this mean that Vitamin C can stop or reverse Parkinson's? Well, there's no evidence of that yet, but taking some sort of antioxidant is useful regardless, and Vitamin C is the most popular and well tolerated.

## Nutrition: Neuroprotective Foods

The best place to start with nutrition is in discussing foods that have neuroprotective properties. Eating foods packed with nutrients and antioxidants will not only contribute to your overall health, but will also help protect against the progression of Parkinson's. This is done by combatting free radicals, the things responsible for premature cell degeneration and death, with antioxidant foods. Foods filled with antioxidants include green vegetables like spinach and broccoli and fatty non-meats like avocado, olive oil, and nuts. You want to minimize animal proteins, since these produce free radicals. This type of diet also includes eating grains and legumes, drinking lots of water, and avoiding processed foods like sugar and deep-fried starches. This diet is healthy, neuroprotective, and will taste delicious when done right.

As a comparison, diets high in red meat, processed foods, and sugary drinks lead to diseases like heart disease, diabetes, and more. Red meat in particular causes

inflammation and the release of free radicals in the body, which leads to brain cell degeneration. Remember, as someone with a chronic illness, you want your body to be as healthy as possible, and it all begins with what you put into your mouth. Let's take a look at these food categories individually.

## Nutrition: Caffeine

There are some studies that show that caffeine can have a neuroprotective effect. Not only has the consumption of coffee and tea been shown to delay the onset of Parkinson's, it has also shown benefit in people already diagnosed with Parkinson's. Caffeine is a drug and can give you a buzz or a high, and there is definitely some interaction between caffeine and the dopamine receptors in our brains. Caffeine can help jumpstart our brains and ease the absorption of medication like carbidopa-levodopa and dopamine agonists.

I have personally had mixed results with caffeine. I do feel like my brain works better when I consume caffeine, and I especially notice improved cognition. However, caffeine amplifies the effects of carbidopa-levodopa, leading to more numerous and intense dyskinesias than normal. Often when I need to use my brain for some especially intense cognitive task like writing, teaching, or programming, I'll typically drink coffee or green tea beforehand. This gives my brain the

cognitive boost needed to complete the task successfully. However, if I'm going out to a restaurant or bar, or I know I'll be walking a lot, I'll typically avoid caffeine to help minimize dyskinesia.

As mentioned earlier, caffeine is known to have neuroprotective effects, but more research is needed to confirm its long-term benefits and whether it helps in slowing the disease progression.

## Conclusion

Hopefully this short guide has given you some knowledge that will help improve your life. As I mentioned earlier, this guide is just a start. If you are interested in learning more about how to adopt the warrior mentality and how to thrive with Parkinson's, I urge you to take a look at my book, [Parkinson's Warrior: Fighting Back and Taking Control](#), on Amazon.

If you have any questions or comments about the book, please feel free to reach out to me: [nick@parkinsonswarrior.com](mailto:nick@parkinsonswarrior.com), and let's talk!

## Book Links

[Parkinson's Warrior – USA](#)

[Parkinson's Warrior – Canada](#)

[Parkinson's Warrior – UK](#)

[Parkinson's Warrior - AUS](#)