

# COVID-19 & PD – Adapting to the new “norm” and breathing easier.

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The COVID-19 pandemic can create new challenges for PD patients. For persons with Parkinson’s disease there is a struggle daily with the “obvious” symptoms of PD and balancing their medications. This fragile equilibrium can be impacted by stress. The new norms of the pandemic - social distancing, listening to the news, increased stress, limited physical activity and changes in routines are having a direct effect on their disease.

In cadence with the CDC, the coronavirus places people who are older or have underlying conditions at a higher risk. Everyone experiences the usual age-related health issues ((i.e., cardiovascular disease, COPD, diabetes, etc.) - with or without PD. PD adds additional health risks to contracting the coronavirus. These additional PD-related risks include:

- Dyspnea - difficulty breathing in the absence of cardiovascular disease.
- Aspiration pneumonia.
- Weakened ability to cough.
- Increased aspiration risk.
- Lowered lung ventilation capacity.
- Respiratory muscle weakness.

Although data on patients with PD is thus far lacking, it is conceivable that people with PD are more susceptible to respiratory complications if they fall ill with the COVID-19 virus.

Another less obvious system assault comes from elevated stress. Researchers state that the pathophysiology of PD puts patients at increased risk of chronic stress. And in addition, a further worsening of these systems may be caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Stress coupled with a reduction of social and emotional support sources and reduced physical activity can have negative health consequences for persons with PD. Many are experiencing periods of worsening motor symptoms with a lessened effectiveness of levodopa. Restrictions on public access to physical activity such as opportunities to go for a regular walk, see a physiotherapist or attend a fitness class especially affect persons with PD.

What are we, as Parkinson’s patients, to do during the COVID-19 pandemic?

**Continue to exercise.** We all know that exercise can help lower stress and ease the symptoms of PD. There are a variety of ways to exercise without leaving your home. Physical activities such as free weights, an exercise routine from your physiotherapist, an exercise class online, YouTube, or on TV. Rock-Steady Boxing exercises online at <https://parkinsonsboxingonline.com/>.

**Manage Stress:** Partake in mindful activities. Yoga, meditation, painting, visiting on the phone with a friend or family, a hobby such as, writing, blogging, sewing, gardening, etc. Activities to relax your mind and body such as yoga or meditation can be found online, YouTube and TV.

**Keep your lungs healthy.** Exercise and nutrition are the key. The process of changing food to fuel is called metabolism. Oxygen and food are the raw materials of the process. Energy and carbon dioxide are

the finished products. Maintaining a healthy weight and the right mix of nutrients in your diet can help you breathe easier. (As always, you should check with your doctor.)

#### Breathing techniques for PD:

Slow deep breaths (as in yoga & meditation)

While sitting upright, simply take a long, slow, deep breath in and hold it for 3-4 sec., if possible.

Exhale slowly. Cough deeply. Repeat 5-10 times. Repeat several times daily. Studies have shown this technique can help reduce the chance of lung infection, improve lung function, and strengthen the lungs during periods of extended rest.

#### Some suggested nutritional guidelines:

Complex carbohydrates: Whole grain bread and pasta, fresh fruits and vegetables.

Limit simple carbohydrates. Limit or restrict sweets.

Fiber: Nuts, seeds, vegetables, fruits.

Protein: Milk, eggs, cheese, meat, fish, poultry, nuts, and dried beans & peas.

Mono- and poly-unsaturated fats: canola, safflower, and corn oils.

Limit salt.

Drink 6 to 8 glasses of water daily.

Eat 4 to 6 small meals daily.

**Keep your immune system healthy:** In short, people with PD have an intact immune system. (Yet, people with PD are prone to lung infections.) We recommend you speak to your MD about immune supporting supplemental or vitamin suggestions.

In short, continue to take care of yourself. Stay strong and stay healthy!

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<https://www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/copd/living-with-copd/nutrition>

[https://www.parkinson.org/understanding-parkinsons/coronavirus?utm\\_source=google%2Bgrant&utm\\_medium=cpc&utm\\_campaign=rkd-covid&gclid=CjwKCAjwwYP2BRBGEiwAkoBpAsooORuEuzHdbKPPZe-P2narqWf\\_iPCLt52BiP\\_I56BPmRHx5FCehoCGsIQAvD\\_BwEhttps://www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/copd/living-with-copd/nutrition](https://www.parkinson.org/understanding-parkinsons/coronavirus?utm_source=google%2Bgrant&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=rkd-covid&gclid=CjwKCAjwwYP2BRBGEiwAkoBpAsooORuEuzHdbKPPZe-P2narqWf_iPCLt52BiP_I56BPmRHx5FCehoCGsIQAvD_BwEhttps://www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/copd/living-with-copd/nutrition)

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