

[IMAGE]

Stop Parkinson's in Its Tracks

By Editorial Staff

Current treatment strategies for Parkinson's disease include medications such as dopamine agonists. Other treatment options focus more on maintaining independence, reducing fall risk and overcoming the progressive speech difficulties that can develop as the disease advances. In other words, not an encouraging picture for someone faced with Parkinson's.

What about exercise? Could something as natural, simple and straightforward as exercise help? Yes, suggests a growing body of research that includes a study in *JAMA Neurology*, a journal of the American Medical Association. The study found that intense treadmill exercise can substantially slow progression of the disease, while less-intense forms of exercise do not delay the progression of symptoms.

Researchers divided Parkinson's disease patients into three groups for comparison, with one group walking gently on a treadmill for 30 minutes a day, four times a week (moderate intensity – 60-65 percent of maximum heart rate); a second group exercising for the same duration and frequency, but at a more intense pace and incline (high intensity – heart rate 80-85 percent of maximum); and a third group that did not participate in either exercise program.

Patients received supervision for one month and then continued the program for an additional five months, at which time researchers evaluated disease status using the Unified Parkinson's Disease Rating Scale motor score, which had been assessed at the start of the study as well. Patients who participated in the high-intensity treadmill program showed almost no decline in scores compared to baseline, while patients in the moderate-intensity program declined by approximately two points, and patients in the control group declined by three points. In other words, Parkinson's symptoms got worse in patients who did not exercise or who exercised at only moderate intensity, but stayed the same in patients who exercised at high intensity.

Just as significant, the exercise program proved tolerable to almost all patients, meaning it is a safe option for helping Parkinson's patients avoid progression of their disease. Considering the debilitating, frustrating nature of Parkinson's disease, that's news we're more than happy to share. Talk to your doctor to learn more about Parkinson's risk factors, prevention and treatment options.

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