



## **Benefits of Yoga for Parkinson's Disease**

Yoga's slow, focused movements, breathing awareness and relaxation techniques are well suited for slowing or reducing the impacts of PD. The practice of yoga encourages mindfulness and builds body & breath awareness. Yoga teacher B.K.S. Iyengar – “Our bodies live in the past, our minds live in the future – yoga joins the two to help us stay present”

1. **Muscle strengthening** – Muscle weakness with PD is usually caused by lack of movement rather than the PD itself so exercise is good!
2. **Increased flexibility and joint range of motion (ROM)**
3. **Improves balance thereby decreasing the risk of falls** – Symptoms of PD that result in changes in posture & movement impair balance and increased tendency to fall
4. **Improves body mechanics and the ability to initiate movement**
5. **Yoga may help decrease pain and the need for medications – which can reduce the risk of falls.**
6. **Yoga may lessen side effects & complications of medical procedures – which can shorten hospital stay and recovery time**
7. **Yogic breathing practices** –
  - a. Increases efficient and effective breathing to improve respiratory function
  - b. Helps reduce panic that can occur in “freezing” - when feet stick to the floor while walking
  - c. Eases frustration with slow movements
8. **Improves sleep quality through positive effects of exercise, sleep promoting postures and use of relaxation and meditation techniques. (Low dopamine levels caused by PD interfere with sleep)**
9. **Increased capacity to cope with stress, depression, and apathy** – because PD patients under stress utilize dopamine differently which can intensify symptoms of PD, it is important to have stress management strategies in place to cope with the day to day unpredictability of PD and later to cope with hitting “the wall” – the realization of the permanence of the PD diagnosis
10. **Yoga can help improve and maintain emotional and mental well being** – improves self awareness and ability to manage intense emotions. Increased self sufficiency enhances confidence. Higher quality of life through increased social connection and support in group classes.

## **Strategies to Practice at Home**

1. **Practice getting up & down from the floor** – this is crucial to maintaining independence - each time you get up, you are strengthening arm, leg, back and abdominal muscles. This practice can increase confidence, reduce fear and increase the likelihood that you can get back up on your own if you do fall. Practice in the company of a caregiver at first - at least twice per day. Use 2 supports one on either side at first if needed. Practice deepens the neuromuscular pathways so that you “Train your Brain”!

## 2. Foot Neuropathy - Exercises

Ankle rotations – this exercise stimulates feet circulation and warms and relaxes the feet. Just take turns rotating one foot clockwise then counterclockwise

Foot flexes – flexes will release the tension in your feet muscles. Just point your feet away from you and hold for a few seconds. Next, draw feet toward you and hold the position again for a few seconds

Scrunch & spread – Make “fists” with your toes and then spread them wide and apart

Heel raise – Raise both heels at the same time and hold the position for a few seconds. This will strengthen your Achilles tendon while also relieving pain

Toe pulls and squeezes – this exercise calms the muscles in the feet. Hold on to each toe one at a time and slowly pull it away from the foot and hold for a few seconds. Then pull it towards the body then hold the position again

Toe separators – with heel of palm resting on sole of foot, place each finger between toes as close to foot as possible. Gently rotate fingers as one unit circling toes in both directions. Draw toes toward sole of foot and away from sole of foot, gently flexing them in 2 directions

Ball or roller massage – Use a golf or similar size rubber ball or roller to roll under the sole of your foot. Use circular, back & forth and up & down motion to reach the entire sole. Pause and gently press into the ball or roller for a few seconds.

3. **Balance** – Stand well in Tadasana (Mountain Pose) – balance evenly over all 4 corners of feet with spine lengthened upward and ankles, hips, ribcage, shoulders and ears stacked one atop the other –
- Shift weight forward until you feel toes grip to keep you upright, then back through Tadasana shifting weight to heels so toes lift – not too far. Continue back & forth, exploring your reactions in body, breath and mind.
  - Observe the adjustments your feet, legs, hips, torso and arms make to maintain balance as you move back & forth.
  - Make the movements smaller until you are back in Tadasana balanced evenly over both feet.
  - From Tadasana - Shift weight to rt. Leg & pick up left heel – move back to Tadasana & shift weight the left foot & pick up rt. Heel. Continue side to side exploration, maybe you are curious about what it would be like to pick up the entire foot on one or both sides. Keep breath flowing.
  - Make the movements smaller until you are back in Tadasana balanced evenly over both feet.

\*\*This type of balance training improves proprioceptive skills and enhances kinesthetic awareness which teaches our central nervous system how to keep us upright when balance is challenged.