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YOGA

# Moving with Parkinson's

BWY and Parkinson's UK are working together to provide resources and inspiration for people living with Parkinson's, their relatives, friends and carers, and teachers who want to support them using simple yoga practices.

## YOGA FOR EVERY BODY BY BWY TUTOR RICHARD KRAVETZ








Parkinson's is a progressive neurological condition that affects movement, often causing tremor, stiffness, slowness and balance problems. These symptoms can disrupt everyday activities and are frequently accompanied by fatigue, low mood, anxiety, reduced confidence and a loss of quality of life.

Growing evidence suggests yoga can be a valuable complement to medical care for people with Parkinson's, offering benefits on both a physical and emotional level. Yoga can support relaxation, which may help reduce tremor and muscle tension, activate under-used muscle groups and provide a clearer sense of body position and how the body moves through space.

Core stiffness, which can make it difficult to walk across a room or stand upright, may be eased by gentle, restorative twists and core-strengthening postures that improve mobility. Yoga can also help counter some of the fatigue and sleep difficulties associated with the condition and its treatments, supporting energy levels and resilience.

Helpful practices include joint mobilisation, strengthening and stretching work, balance exercises, relaxation, breathing practices (pranayama), meditation and simple visualisations.

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# Practices to get you moving

## A seated sequence: warm-up

- Seated mountain: sit tall, anchoring the sitting bones into the chair and pressing the feet firmly into the floor. Lengthen upwards from the pelvic floor to the crown of the head. Soften and draw the shoulders back and down. Keep the head steady, neck long and chin parallel to the floor.
- Chair based joint release exercises (for example): circle your wrists, shoulders and ankles. Roll feet inwards and outwards. Gently turn your head side to side.
- Marching: march the feet up and down, adding gentle arm movements such as circles.
- Leg extensions: Slide one leg along the floor and tap the heel, then bend that knee, return the leg and tap the toes.

## Yoga postures



Pelvic tilts: rock the pelvis forwards and backwards, then progress to a seated cat/cow.

Side stretch: lift one arm and reach over to the side, then repeat on the other side.

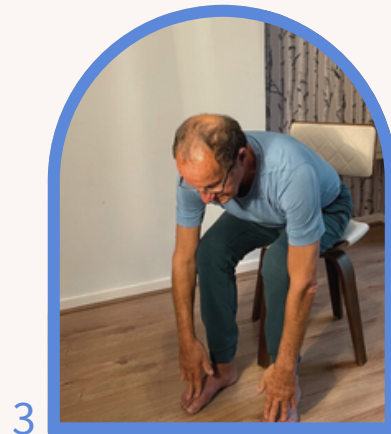


Seated twist: take one hand to the opposite knee and rotate upper body. Change sides.

Seated forward fold: hinge the upper body forwards from the hips keeping spine long.

Hamstring stretch: extend one leg along the floor, flex the toes and feel the stretch along the back of the leg (optional arm raise).

# Seated sun salutation



# Practices to get you moving

Standing (with wall or chair support as needed)



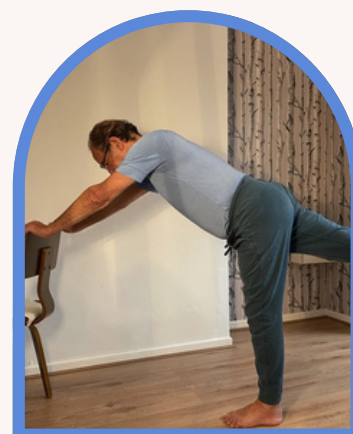
Tadasana (mountain): stand tall. Sweep the arms out and overhead, then draw the hands down, palms together.



Supported standing forward bend: hinge forward from the hips, using the chair for support. Roll up slowly.



Warrior 1: Stand with one foot back, front knee bent, hands on a chair. Lift one arm at a time to shoulder height, both if you feel balanced. Hold for a few breaths before changing legs.



Warrior 3: Step back, lean onto both hands and lift your back legs alternately.



Single-leg lifts: holding a chair, lift one foot, hold for a few breaths, then change sides.



Progression to tree pose: once you have your balance on one foot, try placing your raised foot against the standing leg. Option to bring one (or both) hands to your heart centre.

# Taking yoga off the mat

## Practices to incorporate into everyday life

- Tandem walking: using a wall, table or worktop for support if needed, walk “heel-to-toe” as if on a tightrope. Step forward so the right heel touches the left toes, keeping both feet flat and in a straight line, then alternate feet. If balance feels steady, you can also practise stepping backwards, touching the toes to the back of the opposite heel. Stay upright and avoid looking down, to prevent leaning too far forward.
- Using kitchen counters or sinks: while preparing meals, hold the counter and practise standing on one foot for up to 30 seconds, changing legs, using the support as much or as little as needed.
- Tooth-brushing balance: while brushing your teeth (around two minutes), hold the sink with one hand and the toothbrush with the other, lifting one leg for up to a minute, then change legs.
- Sit-to-stand practice: sitting upright on a chair, use your arms, hands and legs to hinge forward into a half forward bend, then propel yourself up to standing. Reverse and repeat a few times. As strength improves, lower to lightly touch the chair before standing again, widening the stance if needed for stability, and gradually bringing the feet closer together as balance improves.

## Closing the Practice

Classes usually end with seated or supported practices to re-centre and rest, for example:

- Three-part breath in sitting, noticing how the breath moves in the body.
- A short body scan with simple affirmations (for instance, “I am steady”, “I am calm”).
- Brief meditation or relaxation to integrate the practice and support the nervous system.



# How yoga is helping people living with Parkinson's

Yoga works on many different levels – confidence, strength, balance and positivity.

The warrior postures have become especially important for my leg strength and sense of agency. My balance isn't what it was, but I can still stand on one leg!

Tony Bunzl



It helps my flexibility, my breathing and my coordination. When my anxiety rises, counting the breath in and out gives me something solid to hold on to.

Graham Worsdale

Yoga alleviates many of the most troublesome symptoms of Parkinson's, including those associated with dexterity, rigidity and balance. The exercises are safe and gentle and you can do them at home - you just have to be willing to give it a go.

Rob & Chris Herson



# For yoga teachers

## Considerations for yoga teachers

When planning and teaching yoga for people with Parkinson's, it is important to consider:

- Degree and progression of the condition and level of independence
- Medication timing and side effects
- Fatigue and fluctuating energy
- Tremor and involuntary movements
- Muscle stiffness and reduced range of movement
- Balance issues and falls risk
- Anxiety and low mood
- Changes to facial expressions, saliva control and speech
- Sensory issues like sensitivity to room temperature, ability to hear over loud external noise etc.
- Body memory and confidence.

## Aims

Key aims of yoga for people with Parkinson's can include:

- Supporting mood and reducing feelings of isolation and low confidence
- Maintaining joint function and preventing further loss of mobility
- Building muscle strength and improving range of movement
- Using stretching to ease stiffness and support more fluid movement
- Developing breath awareness to support respiratory health and anxiety
- Reinforcing body memory through repetition and mindful movement
- Refining awareness of subtle movements to improve motor control and balance.



## Delivery of your class

Clear, paced instructions help build body awareness, encourage safe alignment and focus the mind in the present moment.

A typical class can last anything from 30-60 minutes, and can be shortened or adapted if participants become tired.

# Further resources

## For everyone



-  If you enjoyed this content and want to learn more about yoga - click here to join British Wheel of Yoga.
-  Take your pick from BWY accessible yoga workshops

## For people with Parkinson's

Parkinson's UK offers tailored support and activities right on your doorstep – from local advisers and a helpline to group meetings and exercise classes.

-  Visit the Parkinson's UK website for more information
-  Find local support, activities and groups near you
-  Why getting and staying active with Parkinson's matters
-  How to exercise safely and confidently at home
-  Explore videos of exercises you can do at home
-  Tune into new 'On The Move' podcasts with guided audio workouts

## For yoga teachers

-  Free two-hour course to understand how exercise supports Parkinson's
-  Register your interest in the BWY short course on yoga for neurological conditions

## With enormous thanks to

-  BWY tutor Richard Kravetz