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Midwest Region

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## GARDENING WITH PARKINSON'S DISEASE

### A Guide to Gardening with Increased Ease

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*Spring is upon us and our gardens await! Setting yourself up for success, a stretching routine, assistive technology, and smart home modifications may be able to make gardening a more attainable activity for someone living with Parkinson's disease. Assistive technology are devices or products that help people carry out everyday activities with increased independence.*

#### Set Up For Success

For those with Parkinson's disease, preparing to garden requires careful consideration to ensure a safe and enjoyable experience. Individuals with Parkinson's may be more sensitive to heat and are at an increased risk of developing melanoma. Planning outdoor gardening activities before 10 am or after 4 pm to avoid peak sunlight hours when the sun's UV rays are strongest, along with wearing sunscreen and sun protective clothing, can be effective to protect against harmful UV rays and decrease the risk of developing skin cancer.

Hydration is key when participating in outdoor activities that increase risk of dehydration and heat stroke, as well as worsen Parkinson's symptoms. Proper hydration not only supports overall health, but also helps to maintain energy levels during gardening tasks.

Additionally, preparing for any potentially uneven surfaces by utilizing mobility aids such



as a walking stick or walker, avoiding gardening when fatigued, and setting up gardens in easy to access areas can enable those with Parkinson's to navigate gardening areas with better balance and stability, as well as reduce risk of falls.

#### Stretching Routine

Stretching before and after gardening can help elongate muscles and prevent injury or soreness. The stretching routine listed below can be completed seated or standing. Seated stretches should be performed if an individual has decreased balance or experiences dizziness with position changes. Be sure to breathe continuously throughout the routine.

### 1. Seated hamstring stretches

Sit up tall on edge of chair with one leg bent and one leg straight ahead. Gently lean forward at the hips until you feel a stretch in the back of the straight leg. Hold this position for 20 to 30 seconds. Perform 2 to 3 repetitions then switch legs. To get a calf stretch while doing this, point your toes of the straight leg toward the ceiling.

### 2. Lateral Bends

Start with your back straight with arms relaxed by your sides. Raise your arms above your head and gently lean to one side. Hold for about 15-30 seconds, return to center, and then repeat on the other side.

### 3. Figure Four Stretch

Start sitting in a chair with back straight and feet hips width apart. Lift one leg off the ground and bend your knee. Place the ankle on the opposite knee to create a number four with your legs. Hold this position for about 15-30 seconds and then switch legs.

### 4. Chest Opener

Start with your back straight and place hands on hips. Squeeze your shoulder blades together while pressing your chest forward. Hold this position for 15-30 seconds.

### 5. Arm Circles

Begin by standing or sitting up straight and extend your arms to the side forming a letter "T" with your arms. Circle your arms clockwise and pretend you are drawing a circle in the air. Complete 15 repetitions and then complete in the opposite direction for 15 repetitions.

### Assistive Technology

There are many assistive devices available that can allow individuals to maintain gardening activities this spring. A raised flower bed or hanging plant baskets can eliminate the need for crouching down

or being on the knees when planting, weeding, and maintaining plants or flowers. If one prefers gardening in the ground, a rolling garden cart or a garden kneeler and seat can help make gardening more comfortable while staying close to the ground. Gardening equipment can be modified to be more accessible for all individuals. A lightweight hose, lightweight watering can, or an automatic sprinkler system could assist in the watering process. Long handled gardening tools or ergonomic gardening tools may ease the process of digging, weeding, or raking. Electric clippers could be an option for an individual that has diminished grip strength. Grippy gloves are also a great solution for increasing grip and stability when utilizing tools. It is important to stay safe when using these tools.

### Resources

Most items can be easily purchased online and some items may be available at gardening stores. If you are unsure of which items to purchase, Missouri Assistive Technology (<https://at.mo.gov/>) has a lending library, including many adaptive gardening tools.

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