

# Cycling for people with Parkinson's Disease

## What's the issue?

Parkinson's Disease (PD) is a common neurological disorder in elderly people. It is caused by a loss of nerve cells in the brain that produce dopamine. The primary symptoms are tremor, bradykinesia (slow movement) and rigidity (stiffness). These often result in gait disturbances and loss of balance. The severity of these symptoms differs greatly depending on the stage of the disease, as well as on the time of the day (medication on-off periods).

## What are the challenges when cycling?

People with PD can experience problems with mounting their bike, keeping balance and making appropriate arm and head movements while riding. Nevertheless, in the early stages of the disease they can still enjoy cycling in a safe way taking some precautions.

## What can you do about it?

Choose a bike with a dropped top tube. This will make it easier to mount. You could opt for an e-bike in order to make pedalling easier and cover longer distances. If you feel your balance is too much of an issue, you could as well opt for a recumbent bike.

Do some mobility and stretch exercises for your neck, lower back and hands before you start your ride and during breaks. (You 'll find a home exercise programme on my website [https://www.bikingbodyplanet.com/](https://www.bikingbodyplanet/))

Avoid busy roads, and pedal in a low gear, especially when you have the wind on top. Take your time at crossroads or when making turns. If you don't feel confident riding alone, take a buddy with you. An extra pair of eyes and ears can literally be a lifesaver.



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When going for a ride, choose the time of day that you're feeling at your best (the so-called medication on period).

As soon as you feel the disease has progressed too much for cycling safely outdoors, you can switch to a stationary bike.

## **What are the benefits of cycling for people with PD?**

Cycling has been demonstrated to be particularly beneficial for the motor performance of PD patients, improving crucial features of gait. Best results are seen at longer-term regimens and higher intensity. This suggests that cycling should be done regularly and consistently while pedalling at a low gear (ideally about 60-80 revolutions per minute).

Studies also show that people with PD who cycle regularly have better balance and cardiovascular condition.

Lastly, cycling improves the overall quality of life of PD patients. Many individuals with gait disturbances are still able to cycle easily and as such experience an improvement in their mobility and social functioning.

## **Sources**

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Daniel, R. Cycling for seniors. Amazon, s.d.

Tiihonen, M., Westner, B.U., Butz, M. *et al.* Parkinson's disease patients benefit from bicycling - a systematic review and meta-analysis. *npj Parkinsons Dis.* **7**, 86 (2021).

<https://www.myparkinsonsteam.com/resources/benefits-of-bike-therapy-for-parkinsons-disease>

<https://davisphinneyfoundation.org/what-you-need-to-know-about-cycling-with-parkinsons/>

## **Any enquiries or need for personal coaching?**

Contact me: [werner@bikingbodyplanet.com](mailto:werner@bikingbodyplanet.com)



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