

#WorldParkinsonsDay



I am a 61 year old mother, grandmother, sister, wife and daughter. I have sailed half way around the world, cycled across England, canoed in New Zealand and spend a lot of time crafting and quilting. I have always been active and taken responsibility for my own health with the help of the gym.

In 2011 I was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease (PD). I had lost my sense of smell some years before, had a tremor in my hands and then, on a hike through the Fish River Canyon, noticed that my left arm did not swing naturally while walking with a stick. (common symptoms of PD). I was devastated and felt terribly sorry for myself. I had mistakenly thought that

this affected only very old people, with stooped posture, shuffling walk and the 'shaking palsy'.

I read that exercise could slow down the effects of the disease and was determined to fight. I have been a member of the Kings Rec since 2008 so continued with regular gym classes until, in spite of my intensions, they became too difficult for me and I withdrew completely. Family members and my gym friends encouraged me to return to the gym on the 'Exercise Referral Programme', which my GP was happy to support, and I was prepared to attempt. I had an initial in-house assessment and, as this neuro-degenerative disease affects everyone differently, given a wide range of exercise options based on my current difficulties. The instructor encouraged me to be realistic and accept where I was regarding the disease and be open minded about trialling them.



I tried water therapy but it did not suit me so the instructor made a list of relevant exercises that I could do independently. This way I can use the pool to swim when I want to and at my own pace, but also have the choice of incorporating some of the exercises with the benefit of being in water. I trialled, and now regularly attend an 'Activity For Life' class. This is circuit based with activities that I had previously considered too easy to contemplate. However, once trying, found that most of the exercises are perfectly pitched for me and some ... horror... very difficult due to tight and painful muscles. I have become very aware of the changes in my body and my need to embrace these exercises. Repetition sometimes leads to my legs feeling heavy and I do run out of energy. Selecting exercises allows me to self-police based on how I feel that day. Stress seems to exacerbate the muscle tightness. When I struggle with an exercise there is no pressure in this class to continue, with the option of playing table tennis or walking. While the class size enables the instructor to be attentive and provide me with adaptations or alternatives if need be.

PARKINSON'S^{UK}
CHANGE ATTITUDES.
FIND A CURE.
JOIN US.

I am now on medication which control most of the symptoms, but these take some time to kick in. The scheduled class times work very well with this and helps me take my meds on time. The class participants are friendly, often meeting afterwards for coffee and a chat. Becoming part of a group and being booked into a class is helping me to keep coming back when my energy and motivation levels are minimal.

I have accepted that I now live with the inevitable progression of PD. But that with effort, help from supportive structures, and exercises, I can maintain a normal life, remain physically active and be creative with the crafts that I am interested in. **'Stand up straight! Stretch!'**

The number of people diagnosed with Parkinson's in the UK is about 145,000.
That's around 1 adult in every 350. #UniteForParkinsons #Parkinsons