

ATTITUDE MATTERS: SIMPLE STEPS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

For People Living With Parkinson's

Why attitude matters: In Parkinson's, mood symptoms—especially depression—can have a major impact on quality of life, sometimes as much as motor symptoms do.^[1] This isn't about forced positivity or pretending things aren't hard. It's about practical strategies that can help you cope better, one small step at a time.

5 Practical Strategies (Pick ONE to Start)

1) DO FIRST, FEEL LATER

The science: Behavioral activation research shows that scheduling and doing meaningful activities can improve mood. Motivation often shows up after you begin—not before.^[2]

How to use it:

- Don't wait to “feel like it.” Pick one simple activity (a short walk, a call, a hobby).
- Put it on your calendar.
- Start small. The win is starting.

This week: Pick one activity. Put it on your calendar. Do it even if you don't feel like it.

2) GRATITUDE + PEOPLE = BETTER DAYS

The science: In an experimental study, practicing gratitude increased subjective well-being and positive mood.^[3] Separate research in older adults found that better social functioning was linked with greater daily happiness and perceived health.^[4]

How to use it (2 minutes):

- Each morning, name one thing you're grateful for (even something small).
- Then reach out to one person (text, call, voice memo, or quick visit).

This week: Try it for 7 days. Notice if your mood or stress feels even slightly steadier.

3) STOP COMPARING, START ADAPTING

The science: Certain thinking loops—like repeatedly comparing today to the past—can worsen depression and anxiety. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) for Parkinson's teaches practical skills to notice and shift these patterns.^{[\[5\]](#)}

How to use it:

- **When you catch yourself thinking:** "I used to be able to..."
- **Finish the sentence with:** "...and now I can..." (find the new way).
- **Example:** "I used to run 5 miles, and now I can walk the block and enjoy the neighbors' gardens."

This week: Catch yourself once and reframe it. Just once. That's progress.

4) SMALL WINS COUNT

The science: Goal-setting research shows that specific, achievable goals improve follow-through and build a sense of progress.^{[\[6\]](#)}

How to use it:

- Set a goal so small it feels almost embarrassing.
- Complete it.
- **Acknowledge it (say out loud:** "I did that.").
- Repeat tomorrow with the same goal or a tiny step up.

Examples of small wins:

- Walk to the mailbox
- Call one friend
- Organize one drawer
- Eat one meal at the table

This week: Pick one small win per day for 3 days.

5) **SERVE SOMEONE ELSE**

The science: Research links helping others (altruism) with improved well-being and sense of purpose. Keep it small so it doesn't drain you. [\[7\]](#)

How to use it:

- Listen to someone for 5 minutes without trying to "fix" it.
- Send an encouraging text to someone who's struggling.
- Share one practical PD tip with someone newly diagnosed.
- Do a small volunteer task (even from home).

This week: Do one small act of service. Notice how you feel afterward.

The one thing to remember

Your attitude isn't about eliminating hard feelings or pretending PD isn't difficult.

It's about this: when faced with a challenge, ask:

- 1) What can I control?
- 2) What will I do about it?

Focus on #2. That's where your power is.

Common mistakes to avoid

- Waiting to feel motivated before acting
- Trying to change everything at once
- Comparing yourself to who you were before PD
- Isolating yourself until you "feel better"
- Thinking a good attitude means never feeling sad or angry

Start today (check ONE box and do it)

- ☐ Schedule one activity for tomorrow (and do it no matter how you feel).
- ☐ Text one person right now.
- ☐ Name three things you're grateful for.

- ☐ Set one tiny goal for today and complete it.
- ☐ Do one small thing to help someone else.

A word from Arthur Brooks (happiness researcher)

Brooks and Oprah Winfrey describe happiness as something you build over time (not a feeling you have every day). They highlight three “macronutrients” of happiness:^[8]

- Enjoyment — pleasure + people + memory (do things with others when possible).
- Satisfaction — the good feeling that comes after effort and progress.
- Meaning — your “why” for getting up each day.

His practical advice: Don’t chase money, power, or fame as a path to happiness. Invest in relationships, values, and work that serves others.^[8]

Remember

Bad days will happen. That’s not attitude failure—that’s being human with a chronic condition.

A good attitude means: on bad days, you still do one small thing. On better days, you build on it.

You don’t have to be inspiring. You just have to keep going.

References

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