

# 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.<sup>[1]</sup> 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.<sup>[2]</sup>

**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.<sup>[3]</sup> Separate research in older adults found that better social functioning was linked with greater daily happiness and perceived health.<sup>[4]</sup>

## 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.<sup>[5]</sup>

### 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.<sup>[6]</sup>

### 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.<sup>[7]</sup>

**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.<sup>[8]</sup>

- 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.<sup>[8]</sup>

## 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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