

PD Power Lunchbox Handout #4

Holistic Tools for Parkinson's

Mindfulness • Deep Breathing • Acupuncture

Medical Disclaimer: This handout shares ideas for education and discussion—not medical advice. Use it as a conversation starter with your physician or Movement Disorder Specialist (MDS). Do not change medications or your care plan based on this handout. All ideas are for discussion with your medical team BEFORE implementing. If a practice makes you feel worse (dizziness, chest pain, panic), stop and tell your medical team.^[1]

Executive Summary (quick read)

- Parkinson's affects movement and also many “non-motor” symptoms: stress, anxiety, sleep, pain, fatigue.^[2]
- Holistic tools won't replace PD meds—but they may help you cope, relax, and feel steadier day to day.^[3]
- **Best strategy:** Ask your medical team if you can try ONE tool for 7 days, track how you feel, and review it with them.

1) Mindfulness / Meditation (calm the mind, support coping)

What it is: Training attention—often by focusing on breath, body sensations, or a guided audio.

What research suggests: Mindfulness-based programs in PD can improve quality of life and emotional symptoms for some people, though results vary by person and study.^[4]

A randomized trial of mindfulness yoga in PD found improvements in anxiety and depressive symptoms compared with control exercise.^[5]

Simple start (3 minutes):

- Sit comfortably. Put both feet on the floor.
- Breathe in 4 seconds, out 6 seconds. Repeat 6 times.
- If your mind wanders, gently return to the breath. That's the practice.

2) Deep Breathing (fast, portable tool)

Why it can help: Slow, deep (diaphragmatic) breathing is a common relaxation technique and may modestly reduce stress signals in the body.^{[6][7]}

A Stanford-led randomized trial found that 5 minutes/day of structured breathing improved mood and reduced anxiety; an exhale-focused pattern called “cyclic sighing” performed especially well.^{[8][9]}

Try this (Cyclic Sighing, ~2–5 minutes):

- Inhale through your nose.
- Take a second, shorter inhale to “top off.”
- Exhale slowly and fully through your mouth.
- Repeat at an easy pace. If lightheaded, slow down or stop.

Safety tips:

- Do breathing seated if you have balance issues.
- Avoid intense hyperventilation or long breath-holds unless your clinician approves.

Credible Breathing Experts (easy to find on YouTube)

- **Dr. David Spiegel (Stanford Medicine):** teaches “cyclic sighing” and provides a simple 5-minute routine; linked to a Stanford randomized breathing study.^[9]
- **Dr. Jack Feldman (UCLA):** a leading academic expert in the science of breathing; featured in Huberman Lab “Essentials.”^[10]
- **Dr. Andrew Huberman (Stanford):** explains practical breathing “protocols” (choose calm, exhale-focused options first).^[11]
- **NIH / NCCIH:** plain-language guidance on diaphragmatic breathing and relaxation techniques.^[6]

Use extra caution with:

- **Wim Hof Method breathing:** can rarely cause lightheadedness or loss of consciousness; the organization warns to practice seated/lying down and never in/near water or while driving.^[12]

3) Acupuncture (possible symptom support; evidence is mixed)

What it is: A licensed practitioner uses very thin, sterile needles at specific points on the body.

What research suggests: Reviews find possible benefits in PD symptoms, but many studies have methodological limits; overall evidence remains inconclusive.^{[13][14]}

APDA summarizes that evidence is mixed and encourages realistic expectations and discussion with your neurologist.^[15]

What is “Community Acupuncture”? Community acupuncture is a delivery model (not a different kind of acupuncture). Treatments are typically done in a shared, quiet room with multiple people at the same time, often in reclining chairs and fully clothed. Clinics commonly use a sliding-scale fee to make frequent visits more affordable.^{[16][17]}

How to do it safely:

- Use a licensed acupuncturist in your state; ask about single-use, sterile needles.
- Tell them if you take blood thinners, bruise easily, or have immune suppression.
- Try a short trial (e.g., 4–6 sessions), then reassess with your medical team.

Your 7-Day Mini-Experiment (pick ONE)

- **Mindfulness:** 3 minutes/day (guided audio is fine).
- **Breathing:** 2–5 minutes/day (cyclic sighing).
- **Acupuncture:** schedule 1 visit and decide on a short trial (4–6 sessions).

Track 4 quick ratings each day (0–10):

- Stress/anxiety

- Sleep quality
- Pain/stiffness
- Overall “steadiness” today

Bring your notes to your MDS. This turns “I think it helps” into useful clinical information.

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