



## **Victory Summit: Exercise**

### **Dance for PD with David Leventhal**

Davis Phinney Foundation

*Note: This is not a flawless, word-for-word transcript, but it's close.*

Polly Dawkins, MBA (Executive Director, Davis Phinney Foundation):

Before we get started, I wonder, wonder if I can introduce you and ask you a few questions?

David Leventhal (Founder, Dance for PD):

Sure. Happy to answer questions, especially if you're asking them.

Polly Dawkins:

Well, it's great to see you here, David. And we have been talking about exercise and sitting for a few hours now, and we're going to be really thrilled to have you lead us in some movement. But before we do that, could you tell us a bit about how did you get involved in this work? What is the origin of dance for Parkinson's?

David Leventhal:

Sure. So, I started life, well at, from age eight on training as a dancer. I started with ballet and then in college I got into modern dance, moved to New York, started dancing with a company called the Mark Morris Dance Group. And in addition to being a performing company, we have a mission to engage with our community. When we opened a new dance center in 2001, we opened our doors and one of the people to walk in was o Weimer, who is the founder and director of the Brooklyn Parkinson Group. We didn't know anything about Parkinson's. I didn't know anything about Parkinson's, but she said, hey, I have a great idea and it's this dance class for people with Parkinson's in my group. Will you do it? And we said yes. And so, I had this parallel track throughout my performing career as a teaching artist that was who was offering classes for people with Parkinson's first in New York. And then as we were a touring company, we started to teach this class all around the world. And that's really how the Dance for PD program grew.

Polly Dawkins:

I love that. That gives me goosebumps. Do we know yet why dance is so great for people with Parkinson's?

David Leventhal:

Great question. We know that it is there are more than 45 peer-reviewed published studies on the impact of dance on people with Parkinson's. And the benefits are a full range from gait, tremor reduction, facial expression, all the way to reduced rates of depression increased social inclusion better self-efficacy, and confidence. And we're starting to see some studies on cognitive benefits related to dance. We know cognitive benefits from the dementia side, there's been some study that shows that dance, more than any other activity, dance has a possibility of staving off dementia, but we haven't seen it yet on the Parkinson's side until the last few years. And we started to see some good research on the impact of dance on executive function visual-spatial memory and sequencing. So that's good. We need more, but it's starting.

David Leventhal:

We don't always know why. And in fact, we need more work on the mechanisms. One theory is that because dance forces you to integrate music and rhythm in your movements, that there's a kind of detour that happens around some of the challenges the neurological challenges that happen in Parkinson's, but it's, it, we need more, more work. And it's very hard to do an MRI on a dancing body. Usually, in an MRI, you have to be very still and not move. So, the work that's been done on imaging so far has been on people imagining that they're dancing, which is pretty close, but not the same as actually dancing.

Polly Dawkins:

Right. Well, before we start dancing can you tell us a little bit about how people who are watching could get involved in dance, whether it's virtually or in person?

David Leventhal:

Sure. So, Dance for PD classes are offered in more than 300 communities and 28 countries around the world where in almost every state in some form. And you can visit our website, which is [danceforpd.org](http://danceforpd.org) to find a local class near you. We also offer still a pretty robust schedule of online classes that are taught either by our team, our flagship team in New York, or by Dance for PD-certified teachers around the country. And so those are classes that are at all different times of day, all different time zones and they can be done on Zoom. What's nice about that is that you don't have to make a plan to go out to the gym or find something near you. It's great on a rainy day. It's great if you're not feeling like getting out of the house, just turn on your computer. And I think actually dance works. We, I never thought I'd say this, but it actually works pretty well on Zoom better than some other things where you might need some equipment, you might need that punching bag. It works pretty well. And we create a social environment on Zoom so people connect and have time after class to chat and go into breakout rooms.

Polly Dawkins:

Super. All right. So, we're going to get started here. We're going to hand over the floor to you. Is there anything our audience needs to know as they get started?

David Leventhal:

I just want to say that it's really important for me, and Polly, you heard me say this at all a couple of weeks ago, that you, as someone living with Parkinson's, wherever you are, think about a portfolio of activities. There is no single activity that is going to address all the things you need to do. So, I recommend finding a cluster of things. It doesn't have to be 10 things, maybe it's two or three. And we also have to think about ourselves as athletes and athletes cross-train. I often play a video of Harry Garside, who is a boxer, an Australian Olympic medalist boxer who takes ballet because, for him, it gives him that 1% edge to win. When he, when he does that ballet training, it's the footwork, it's the balance, it's the coordination. It's the rhythm that helps his boxing.

So, it's not just one thing or the other. It's finding those things that intersect, that feed off of each other. So, I highly recommend cross-training. If you're totally a die-hard Rock Steady Boxing fan, try dance. See how much it can actually improve your boxing practice. If you're not into dance, try Pedaling for Parkinson's. See how much it can actually stimulate your endurance and your rhythm that you can then bring back to the dance class. So, it's a kind of all of the above process that we have to go through in making those choices.

Polly Dawkins:

That's perfect. That compliments exactly what Daniel Corcos just said. So perfect. Great.

David Leventhal:

So, I know I have 10 minutes, I'm going to kind of dive into a couple things. The other thing is a lot of people think Dance for PD is for folks who, who need to remain seated. That is not true. We offer both seated and standing options in our class. In fact, we offer an all-standing class as well. Today, since I can't see you, I don't really know all of you. And I want you to be safe at home. I'm going to show two things that are seated, and then the last thing will be standing. But you always have the option to stay seated if it's comfortable for you. Do what is safe, do what feels right for you in the moment and have fun.

So, I thought we would start with just a little bit of tango. This is movement based in Argentine tango. And because I don't have a lot of time to kind of give you a long history and explanation, we're just going to go into it. We're going to start with some nice simple articulations through the feet. I know we've been sitting for a while, so it'll feel good to get your feet moving. We're going to say some, take some simple tango step side to side. So, this is a strong step. And then a slide of the other foot in. We'll take that a few times. We'll take some nice long reaches side to side. And then I want you to imagine that you are holding a partner in your arms and you're

dipping that partner forward and coming back. So those are the four elements. Let's go into it right now. Oh, and before we start, I just want to say that if there's anything here that doesn't feel right for your body, please feel free to modify, adapt, change, go easy, listen to the music, whatever feels right for you. All right, here we go. Let me just get the music so that you can hear it. That's more important than me hearing it. Here we go.

Just slowly pushing up through your feet. If you're wearing shoes, that's okay too. And now our steps, we step and slide and step and slide and step. You'll Notice when I step, I'm taking a nice open stance. Open arms. Good. Now send that foot out. Find your balance in the Middle. Nice. Reach Out And center and reach. Nice, wide base, dipping your partner down and bringing that person up. And the other Side.

Good again, and let's try that whole sequence again. So, starting with the feet, we push and press. Think about making an impression in the ground to your whole footprint, like pushing that wet, cement out,

Nice And stable, side to side, step And, And step. He's strong and strong. Now let this be sharp, like a surprise and Ready to dip your partner. We go over, bring that person up to the other side and pushing the floor away. So really connecting with the floor, Pushing That floor Away, Finishing with some anise. These are little improvised patterns on the floor. You can go any direction you want, doing some circles, and you can bring that on the other side as well. Little Circles. You can even Lift the Foot up a little bit If you want.

This foot is my Anchor. It's very stable Now. Everybody. All right? beautiful. I can't see you, but I'm sure that was beautiful. Had all the elegance of tango. We're going to go into a little bit of call and response. The call and response here. Dance is first and foremost a mental activity. We have to think, we have to process, we have to sequence. So, I'm going to do a pattern in my upper body and then I'm going to mirror it in my lower body. So, it's call and response. And we're going to go through this all together again. Do what feels good for you in the moment. Have fun with it. And pick yourself up as the song goes. We're starting with the upper body, just a hand. I'm going to go out and now with a foot, same on the other side. We reach, Echoing That in the lower body, same thing side, echoing in the foot, same other side, Lifting Up and over. Now getting a little more Complex.

This is our heel of our hand. And now then in your heel, app, other stuff. But We're Following the same pattern, same quality, nice and smooth and around, oh, what does that look like? Other side? Anything, left? I'm sure I did. Forward. Let's try that one more time. Reach, Bring it back. Reach. Starting with the other side. Yeah. Call a shuffle and tap. Bring it in other side. Shuffle. I think that one deserves one more chance. All right, now we're going to go back to the beginning and we're going to start putting everything together. Your upper body and lower body. Ready with our heel. Here we go. And now adding the little extra. Yeah. Other sides. Let's share that one more time. It's kind of fun. Scoop. Press Out scoop. Press forward. Thinking out

about that impression you're making on the floor, Your Whole foot pressing down. Good One. New one. Open. Open. Close. Open. Oh, Let's start on the other side. Nice big finish.

Yeah. Great. All right. Excellent. Now, a lot of what we do in in our dance PD classes is reference specific shows, specific dances. We in New York, like to do a lot of Broadway stuff. So, we're going to finish in the last three minutes here with a little west side story. So, I can't see you, but I want your choice whether you'd like to be a jet or a shark. Alright, so your choice, because as we go along, I'm going to call out various choices. And sometimes it'll be everybody together. The whole, the whole cast. Sometimes it'll be just the jets, sometimes it'll be just the sharks. Okay? So, make your choice for yourself, whatever feels right for you today. And let's go into this. We're going to start with some really strong pointing. Now this is a choice for you.

If you are comfortable and want to make your way up out of the chair, just do that safely right now. Take a moment to do so. If you're more comfortable staying seated, you're welcome to do that too. I am going to show the seat diversion because it's sometimes a little bit harder to interpolate what the sea diversion adaptation is. So, I'm going to stay here, but all of this can be done standing as well. We're going to start with some points. We're going to go back to our side to sidestep, but this time we're going to add a little bit of rhythm. So, as I step together, I'm going to create that pulse down through my knees, make a sound, wake up your neighbors. S then we're going to travel in place. So, whether I'm here or whether I'm here, I'm really taking a nice solid step into the floor. Again, we've been talking today about making an impression in that cement. This is that chance to do it. You're going to grow; you're going to retreat. And then finally you're going to grow endow. You're going to explode at the other side. All right? Whether you're a jet, you're going to explode in the sharks. The sharks are going to come back to us. Okay? We have to imagine because we're all on zoom, but let's try it here all together, starting with our points and moving through. Five, Six. Here we go. Really reaching Beyond Your natural sphere.

Here you're sending your energy out the room, stepping side to side. We'll start at the speed to really get the rhythm in our bodies. Nice. Now our steps a little faster. I call these splat blocks. It's like your foot and your hand are going splat now. Inflate and release and inflate and release. Now we're going to inflate and then explode. 1, 2, 3, 4, Plie. And if you make a sound so much the better. 2, 3, 4. Whoa. Any sound you want, reach two. Nice wide base scoop. Last one, big as you can, back to the beginning a little faster. Now, point somewhere you haven't pointed yet. Maybe behind you. Maybe under you. Let's do our steps a little faster. Big steps in place. Yeah.

Now anchoring your feet into the floor, push that floor away as you expand. One more, just like that. We're going to do two explosions. Now we go Three, four, plie. Take it out. Plie. Cool. Three, Four, release point. Just finishing with our steps, playing it. Real cool. Thinking of one giant final pose for the very end. Whatever you want to your own space.



Yeah. Good. All right. I'm going to pause there and come back to say thank you. Thank you for the opportunity. Thank you for moving with me next time. Let's do this where I can actually see you and we can do it as a full communal experience, because that's the power of dance. And as I said recently at, at all in, you know, we as humans have been dancing together as a communal energy, as a social bond for tens of thousands of years. And this is something that is part of our legacy as a species. And so, it's just a natural progression for us to do this as we continue in our lifespan, as we continue in our Parkinson's journey. Let dance be part of your life and thank you so much for the opportunity to share. Thanks Polly.

### **Want More Practical Articles Like This?**

Much more can be found in the Every Victory Counts® manual. It's packed with up-to-date information about everything Parkinson's, plus an expanded worksheets and resources section to help you put what you've learned into action.

[Request Your Manual Now](#)

Thank you to our Peak Partners, Amneal, Kyowa Kirin, and Sunovion for making it possible for us to print, distribute, and ship the Every Victory Counts manual.