

THE AMERICAN PARKINSON DISEASE ASSOCIATION, INC.

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EDUCATIONAL SUPPLEMENT #12

The Fine Art of “Re-creation & Socialization” With Parkinson’s Disease

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If we close our eyes and ponder life’s pleasant, happy moments, we surely conjure up memories of time well spent enjoying recreational and social activities.

“Recreation,” according to Webster, is “any play or amusement used to relax or refresh the body or mind.” And, because we are social beings, recreation is done best when we “socialize,” that is when we do it with others.

Studies have shown that the happiest people, regardless of age or disability, are those who are active, stay in-touch with

others, continue to learn throughout life and help other people. For many of us, though, finding the time and energy for recreational and social activities, even in the best of circumstances, can be a challenge. So, it is no surprise that for those living with Parkinson’s disease either as the patient or as the carepartner, it can be very hard to find the desire to “play” and “socialize.” Hence, “recreation” becomes a process of “re-creation.” In other words, folks discover new ways to define what makes them happy, offers them fun and relaxation, and ultimately gives meaning to their lives.

Joan, an active Parkinson's disease support group leader, typifies someone who strives to achieve a balance in her life. And, she does this with a smile and lots of good humor. Joan is in her mid-fifties and was diagnosed with PD about four years ago. Her lifestyle changes, over time, have included starting on medication, becoming involved with a PD research study and leaving a stressful job. A firm believer in the benefits of self-help, Joan quickly located a local support group soon after diagnosis. Before long, Joan was leading the group. She also started teaching catechism classes for first graders at her church. Joan lives alone and is in close contact with her adult children. Because she has curtailed driving long distances, she has become more comfortable asking family and friends for rides. Recently, Joan moved to a condominium in an adult community. This relocation better meets her present (and future) physical and social needs. Joan has discovered this fine art of "re-creating" and Socializing with her PD!

The HOW TO's for this re-discovery process vary between individuals. And, for those living and coping with PD, based on how the illness is at any one point in time, enjoyment from these activities can also vary. What is important to remember, though, is when seeking pleasure and fulfillment, consider the quality of the moment at hand.

The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), in its THINK OF YOUR FUTURE Retirement Planning Workbook, puts forth an action plan for leisure pursuits. A sampling of these activities include:

CONTINUING EDUCATION:

Older adults are returning to school in record numbers. Everything from adult education courses at local high schools all the way to actual college classes can offer an eager mind the excitement of lifelong learning, regardless of age or disability.

Gladys, a Parkinson caregiver, recently attended her fiftieth college reunion. She is also currently enrolled in a computer class at her alma mater. When interviewed for the school's alumni newspaper about her reason for wanting to attend classes at this time in her life, she simply replied: "I've come a long way baby!"

Incidentally, many in the Parkinson community like Gladys are finding tremendous benefits from use of a personal computer. This technology can offer everything from e-mail communication to Parkinson Web access on the Internet.

EMPLOYMENT:

Aside from the financial rewards of labor, work does give us a sense of status, provides structure to our days and promotes friendships. If you decide to stay in or take on a paid job, you may need to consider some alternatives to the traditional work structure. Flextime, job sharing and part-time employment are examples of this. The American with Disabilities Act (ADA) provides protection and reasonable accommodations for any person with a disability on the job. Other work choices might include starting your own at-home small business. Hobbies can also provide you with income as well as fun if you decide to sell your wares to acquaintances or at craft shows.

VOLUNTEERISM:

To paraphrase anthropologist Margaret Mead, almost anything that really matters in life about the way human life should be carried on depends on some form of volunteerism. Volunteering has become more widespread than ever. Before you get involved as a volunteer, you need to decide what you want to do and, more realistically, what you can do. Hospitals, day care centers and foster grandparent programs all have good volunteering options. And, if you are a member of a local Parkinson support

group or Chapter, why not start right there? Offering to bake refreshments, contact a speaker for the next meeting, operate a telephone tree or merely write name tags for members are all meaningful ways to help. In essence, the more you put into your group or Chapter, the more benefits you will reap.

GROUP AFFILIATION:

Whether you belong to a local social club like the town senior center or a special interest organization such as the VFW, there are opportunities to socialize and have fun with other people who share similar likes. In addition, many health care organizations offer affiliation programs. For instance, at the hospital of Saint Raphael in New Haven, CT, CareCard is a free senior membership service. Belonging to CareCard provides such benefits as health screens, educational programs and telephone counseling. In addition, CareCard sponsors exercise programs such as aquasize, group walking and Tai Chi. Many Parkinsonians join these classes which are tailor made for seniors with all levels of disability. Exercise programs give those with PD not only a feeling of well-being but also control over their disease.

Travel options are a benefit of CareCard

as well as other organizations such as AARP. Travel involves much more than just sightseeing. It involves interacting with people in other places. With PD, travel needs to be well planned whether for a day trip or a summer excursion. But, keep in mind, travel agencies are very in-tuned with the special requests of seniors or those with disabilities. And, getting away from home can be the perfect form of recreation!

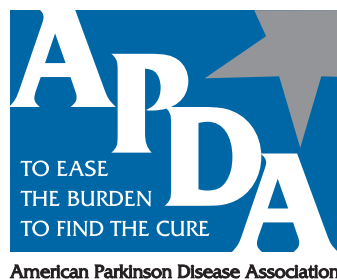
Joan, our active PD support group leader has said that, surprisingly, in some ways “her life is better than it was before the diagnosis of PD” despite the fact that she

has had to make some tough personal life decisions. She states: “I’ve learned to listen to my body, eat when I’m hungry, rest when I’m tired and maintain a regular exercise program.” And through her many involvements, she feels she is reaping the rewards of time well spent. Joan states that with PD you have to “catch joy as it flies by.” She continues: “Everything has a gift and the illness of Parkinson’s, for me, has been a gift...” Joan has discovered this fine art of “recreating” and socializing with her PD!

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