

# The Parkinsonian

The Magazine Of Parkinson's New Zealand Charitable Trust

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## The vital role of nutrition

This article covers key topics from our recent webinar, "A Parkinson's Plate" with Professor Fiona Lithander, including weight loss, dietary patterns, constipation, and exercise. At the end, you'll find a link to the full webinar along with recommended readings.

### A NEW ERA HAS BEGUN

In recent years, the approach to managing Parkinson's has shifted towards including non-pharmacological methods. Since 2000 there have been nearly 2,500 research papers published on nutrition and Parkinson's which Associate Professor Fiona Lithander, a dietitian and nutrition scientist at the University of Auckland, says highlight the growing interest in how nutrition can play a vital role in managing symptoms and overall wellbeing.

### NUTRITION AND WEIGHT LOSS

Maintaining a healthy weight is particularly important for people with Parkinson's as studies show that people with the condition tend to weigh less than those without. Lower weight increases the risk of malnutrition which can lead to reduced quality of life and worsened cognitive symptoms. A research group at the University of Bristol, which included Professor Lithander, studied people with Parkinson's and discovered that weight loss tends to speed up about three or four years after diagnosis.

### CAUSES OF WEIGHT LOSS

There are many causes of weight loss. Medications often have side effects such as nausea, vomiting,



and gastrointestinal issues, which can reduce appetite. Issues with chewing and swallowing, as well as worries about choking can contribute to weight loss by eating less. Tremors and involuntary movements, on the other hand, increase calorie expenditure, further contributing to weight loss.

To combat weight loss, it is recommended to consume three balanced meals a day with 2-3 snacks to maintain energy levels. Enhance meals with extra ingredients to boost calorie intake. If solid food is unappealing, liquid meals like milkshakes or smoothies can be a good alternative.



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## WEIGHT LOSS IN PARKINSON'S IS NOT JUST ABOUT LOSING FAT; IT ALSO INVOLVES LOSING MUSCLE MASS AND STRENGTH

As we age, muscle mass naturally declines, a process known as sarcopenia. This can affect our ability to do everyday activities like walking, getting up from a chair, climbing stairs and lifting objects. After age 70, muscle loss becomes more significant, so monitoring weight and maintaining muscle health through exercise and nutrition is vital.

## Dietary Patterns and Parkinson's

While there is no special diet for Parkinson's, focusing on balanced nutrition can improve the quality of life for people who are living with Parkinson's.

### THE MEDITERRANEAN DIET

Among various dietary patterns, the Mediterranean diet shows promise for its potential benefits in Parkinson's management.

Rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, fish, and healthy fats, it offers neuroprotective and anti-inflammatory benefits, supporting cognitive and gastrointestinal health. It is also beneficial for heart health and cardiovascular health, making it a promising dietary pattern.

### THE KETOGENIC DIET

The Ketogenic diet, high in fat and low in carbohydrates, has been studied for its feasibility, safety and impacts on motor and non-motor symptoms. However, long-term use should be supervised by a dietitian as there are concerns about gut bacteria changes, malnutrition, and micronutrient deficiencies.

While there is potential, Professor Lithander says that more evidence is needed before recommending the Ketogenic diet for Parkinson's.

### ADDRESSING CONSTIPATION

With constipation affecting over 50% of people with Parkinson's, fibre is an important part of our diet. Simple changes, like adding fruits, nuts, or seeds to breakfast cereals while drinking plenty of fluids can help to alleviate constipation. There is increasing interest in how gut bacteria affect Parkinson's. The gut has many helpful bacteria, and using probiotics, prebiotics, and synbiotics may help with constipation but more long-term research is needed.

### EXERCISE

Exercise, alongside nutrition, plays a crucial role in managing Parkinson's. Regular exercise, including Parkinson's specific exercises, helps maintain muscle mass and strength, counteracting the effects of



sarcopenia. Alongside slowing down the progression of Parkinson's exercise also contributes to our overall mental well-being, reducing symptoms of anxiety and depression often associated with Parkinson's.

As research continues lifestyle changes such as nutrition, weight management, maintaining muscle strength and exercise are becoming increasingly important and can lead to improved symptom management and quality of life.

### RECOMMENDED WEBINAR AND READINGS



#### PARKINSON'S NEW ZEALAND EXERCISE BOOKLET

<https://www.parkinsons.org.nz/get-support/exercise-programs>



#### NUTRITION AND PARKINSON'S LINKS

<https://www.parkinson.org/living-with-parkinsons/management/diet-nutrition>

[https://www.michaeljfox.org/sites/default/files/media/document/Diet\\_Brain\\_Health\\_Guide\\_single\\_pages\\_12.08.22.pdf](https://www.michaeljfox.org/sites/default/files/media/document/Diet_Brain_Health_Guide_single_pages_12.08.22.pdf)

<https://parkinsonseurope.org/i-have-parkinsons/self-help-and-living-well/diet-and-nutrition/>

[https://www.parkinsons.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-01/10507\\_Diet%20and%20Parkinsons\\_44pp\\_V6.pdf](https://www.parkinsons.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-01/10507_Diet%20and%20Parkinsons_44pp_V6.pdf)



#### THE PARKINSON'S PLATE WEBINAR

<https://youtu.be/PSOFSMEF6MA?SI=GJYKBM3ARTOBTNMW>

## A MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIRPERSON AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE

### Our motto captures our purpose: *Living Positively with Parkinson's.*

Our goal is to energise and motivate people with Parkinson's to 'keep on keeping on'. And what a busy year it has been. Our vision is for a 'rash' of **Red Tulip Groups** spread across the country where people with Parkinson's can connect over a shared interest such as singing, painting, walking, bowling, enjoying coffee, playing golf, or even an epic game of ping-pong.

Our **Get Going for Parkinson's** programme often inspires people to take on physical challenges they might never have attempted if not for their diagnosis. There's nothing more uplifting than seeing the smile on the face of someone who has conquered a personal milestone.

Following our success this year, we will once again celebrate World Parkinson's Day by joining the international **Spark the Night** campaign. On 11 April, we invite building owners to illuminate their buildings in blue as a bright show of support and awareness for people living with Parkinson's.

Our aim in 2026 is to continue to grow our ability to support people with Parkinson's and their care partners and whānau. In response to the growing numbers of early onset Parkinson clients, we hope to host another **Upbeat Conference** for clients who are 65 years of age and younger. We are delighted that our partnership with Outward Bound will also continue in 2026 encouraging the same group of people to test their limits.

We hosted our first **Caring Well | Living Well Conference** aimed at upskilling clinicians who treat people with Parkinson's in their clinics. This was made possible through generous sponsorship by Healthcare New Zealand and also support by STADA.

The Board has welcomed four new Trustees after retirements created vacancies. We were very fortunate to receive more applications than



CHRISTINE MERCER



ANDREW BELL

vacancies and so the Board have been able to appoint based on their requisite skills to balance the Board. You will find their profiles in this edition of the Parkinsonian.

It has also been a very busy year engaging with government Ministers and officials to persuade them that a contract to help fund the clinical services we provide, is urgently required. We have yet to have success given that the government is currently defunding charities. This is disappointing as we have experienced a 15% increase in clients this year with between 55 - 80 new clients joining our service each month. It is getting increasingly difficult to fund the growth and we certainly couldn't do it without the generous support we receive from our donors and grant funders. One of the very generous and vital income streams is from bequests. We have teamed up with our pro-bono lawyers Gibson Sheat to develop a new Bequest booklet which we hope will assist many families to invest in our future through a gift in their Will. Despite the funding challenges, help is still just a phone call away for people with Parkinson's, their care partners, and whānau.

As the year draws to a close, I hope that you have a wonderful time of relaxation and celebration with family and friends over the Christmas season, and that your New Year's resolution is to **live positively with Parkinson's in 2026.**

CHRISTINE MERCER AND ANDREW BELL

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[www.parkinsons.org.nz/get-involved/bequest](http://www.parkinsons.org.nz/get-involved/bequest)



## MEET THE TRUSTEES

# Introducing new trustees to the Parkinson's New Zealand Board

We were delighted with the high calibre of applicants who applied to join the Board this year. After reviewing the skills matrix and identifying the skills we require for a balanced Board we are happy to share that our four new trustees are: Bruce McGregor, Deborah Hardiman, Ian Thursfield and Kait O'Callahan.



### BRUCE MCGREGOR

Bruce is a retired lawyer with extensive experience in commercial law, trusts, Wills and financial accounting, including trust and business accounting. He values integrity and congeniality in business and has significant experience working with Māori through the Māori Land Court and with Māori clients. Living with Parkinson's Bruce also actively participates in Parkinson's New Zealand activities.



### DEBORAH HARDIMAN

Deborah is a professional with over 20 years of experience in finance, technology, legal, consulting, and governance. She is passionate about contributing to the Parkinson's community due to her father's diagnosis. Deborah currently works as Head of Portfolio Finance at ASB and serves as Board Chair of the Neuro Connection Foundation. She is committed to improving outcomes in health, education, and community sectors through strong governance and leadership.

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### IAN THURSFIELD

Ian is a former corporate finance specialist who worked at KPMG, becoming a partner and head of the Deal Advisory division. He has extensive

international experience and held significant responsibilities in profit and loss, HR, Risk management, and governance. Since retiring and following his diagnosis in 2019 Ian has become active in Parkinson's-related activities.



### KAIT O'CALLAHAN

Kait is an educator and researcher in health care and digital learning committed to equity, wellbeing, and community care. She coordinates

clinical placements and co-leads stakeholder engagement for the Bachelor of Medical Imaging at Unitec. She is also a digital learning advisor. Kait is research-active, focusing on technology that enhances workforce wellbeing and autonomy, with recent work on AI in radiology and healthcare.

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## Meet Parkinson's Educator Vicki Sadgrove



VICKI SADGROVE

I am a Parkinson's Educator in Northland. My area covers from Te Hana to Kawakawa including the Kaipara and Mangawhai area.

I have worked for Parkinson's NZ for 15 years and my background is as an Enrolled Nurse.

I support people with Parkinson's and their whānau in the community offering home visits and telehealth support. I hold four support group meetings a month in Whangarei, Waipu, Dargaville and a carers meeting. I organise speakers on Parkinson's Disease, work alongside local providers and share trustworthy information. I interact with GPs as needed and have good relationships with Te Whatu Ora specialists and the multidisciplinary team. Via Healthlink NZ I can refer clients to the Neurology Clinic, Elder Clinic, Speech Therapists, Physios, Occupational Therapists and

Dietitians and I am able to email/phone local specialists if I have concerns about a client's health needs.

One of the most common symptoms impacting people with Parkinson's can be constipation. Ideally everyone should have a bowel motion every 1-2 days. With Parkinson's Disease the gut emptying is slowed as well as the bowel muscle movement. When you are constipated your medications are not absorbed properly in the gut either so finding the right balance between diet, fluid, exercise and laxatives is very important.

I discuss dietary advice such as some fibre but not too much as that can bulk the faeces up making it harder to move, adequate fluid intake, maintaining a regular exercise regime and advise people with Parkinson's to discuss constipation with their GP who may suggest laxatives. A tip I share is to place your feet on a stool when on the toilet, rock gently and give yourself time which may also help with a bowel movement. Online supports such as PNZ website & fact sheets and Continence NZ are helpful as well. It is about finding a regime that works for each person.

## Help us Spark the Night for World Parkinson's Day – April 11, 2026!

Spark the Night is a global awareness campaign inspired by PD Avengers in the USA to shine a light and bring hope to people with Parkinson's.

As part of World Parkinson's Day on April 11th cities from round the globe light up their buildings and landmarks in blue in solidarity with the 11.8 million people with Parkinson's worldwide including 13,000 New Zealanders who are living with the condition.

Let's make 2026 bigger! If you know of a building or monument in your community that can shine a light for Parkinson's please email [helen.carter@parkinsons.org.nz](mailto:helen.carter@parkinsons.org.nz)



SPARK THE NIGHT – MICHAEL FOWLER CENTRE



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Please do not interpret anything in this magazine as medical advice. Always check with your doctor. The appearance of any article or other material in this publication does not imply the agreement of Parkinson's New Zealand with the opinions expressed therein.

## New Season, New Start – Movement is Medicine

A new season is the perfect time to pause, reflect and reset. Summer brings longer days and more light – a chance to move your body, try something new and focus on what helps you feel your best. Movement, hydration and good nutrition all work together to support energy, confidence and wellbeing.

We all know that movement is medicine when it comes to Parkinson's. Regular movement can lift mood, ease stiffness, improve sleep, and support independence. Every bit counts.

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**QUICK CHECK:** Are you moving every day in some way – through a walk, stretch, or exercise class?

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### SETTING MEANINGFUL GOALS

Goals are important at any stage or age of life – they give us direction, purpose, and something positive to work towards.

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**QUICK CHECK:** Do your current goals feel realistic and meaningful? If not, adjust them to better match your energy, lifestyle and values.

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- Set realistic and achievable goals that fit your current abilities and energy levels.
- Be specific – for example, “walk for 15 minutes after breakfast” rather than “walk more.”
- Focus on consistency first; regular movement creates lasting benefit.
- Choose goals that feel meaningful and give you a sense of purpose – knowing why you move helps sustain motivation.
- Choose activities that you enjoy, as enjoyment increases adherence.
- Share your goals with a friend, trainer, or health professional – accountability helps maintain motivation.
- Celebrate progress, no matter how gradual – evidence shows that recognising success builds motivation and confidence.

### STAYING ACTIVE THIS SUMMER

- Mix it up: walking, pickle ball, cycling, boxing, dancing, or resistance training. Try something new.
- Build movement into everyday life – gardening, household chores, or social outings.
- Align your routine with your medication and energy levels.



- Join community or Parkinson's-specific classes for support and motivation.
- Perfection isn't the goal – consistency is. Even a few minutes of movement can make a difference.

### HYDRATION AND NUTRITION – FUEL YOUR MOVEMENT

- Begin your day with water and keep a drink bottle handy throughout the day.
- Fluids from foods also count – fruit, soups, milk, and herbal teas all help keep you hydrated.
- Aim for pale-coloured urine as a guide that you're well hydrated.
- Enjoy colourful, seasonal foods: vegetables, fruit, lean protein, and wholegrains.
- It is recommended to take levodopa 30-45 minutes before meals
- Balanced meals and regular fluids support energy, focus, digestion, and recovery after exercise.

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**QUICK CHECK:** Feeling tired, foggy, or dizzy? You may need more fluids. If symptoms persist, speak with your healthcare team.

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Prepared by 2025 by Emma Goldstraw, Parkinson's Movement Specialist and Health Coach. Emma supports people living with Parkinson's to stay active, confident and connected through movement and education – [www.emmagtotalhealth.co.nz](http://www.emmagtotalhealth.co.nz)

## WE NEED YOUR HELP!

**13,000 New Zealanders** woke up to another day with Parkinson's




Help them face the day

**DONATE TODAY**

Parkinson's New Zealand has been here for people with Parkinson's and their carers for over 40 years, and we want to continue to provide the best information, education and support until a cure is found.

You can help by donating a single or a monthly gift. **Please donate** into our bank account **Parkinson's New Zealand Charitable Trust - 03 0502 0727744 00** Ref PARKINSONIAN, **donate online at [www.parkinsons.org.nz](http://www.parkinsons.org.nz)** or **call us on 0800 473 4636** and use your credit card.

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## Parkinson's New Zealand 2025 Annual Client Satisfaction Survey Results



**88%** of people with Parkinson's say they are better able to manage their condition as a result of their interaction(s) with their Parkinson's Educator.



**85%** of people with Parkinson's are either extremely satisfied or satisfied with the service provided by our Parkinson's Educators.



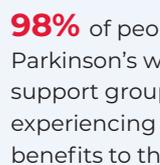
**72%** of people with Parkinson's reported that their Parkinson's Educator's advice led to a positive change in their medication management.



**94%** of people with Parkinson's who attend support groups have an increased understanding of their condition.



**90%** of people with Parkinson's find the information in the Parkinsonian magazine useful.



**98%** of people with Parkinson's who had attended support groups reported experiencing one or more benefits to their wellbeing.\*

- 👉 **93%** felt more connected
- 👉 **85%** felt less isolated
- 👉 **89%** felt an increased sense of belonging
- 👉 **77%** felt an increased sense of purpose
- 👉 **74%** felt increased self-esteem

*\*Reported benefits are greater than 100% as more than one option can be chosen to reflect the overall benefit to their wellbeing.*

Results taken from Parkinson's New Zealand's Annual Client Satisfaction Survey, 2025.

# OUTWARD BOUND

## OUTWARD BOUND UPBEAT

**COURSE DATES:**  
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### ABOUT THE COURSE

UPBEAT is a seven day course for people who have early onset Parkinson's. This is your chance to get outdoors and have your own Outward Bound experience in the beautiful Marlborough Sounds.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

Parkinson's New Zealand 0800 473 4636  
Outward Bound website:  
[www.outwardbound.co.nz/upbeat](http://www.outwardbound.co.nz/upbeat)



"I found the course life changing. On the Outward Bound course I had fun, and with or without Parkinson's having fun is what is important in life."

**Monica**



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