

From Sarah King, DPT

A letter to my clients on the day they were diagnosed

Dearest Friend,

Today likely didn't go the way you planned nor wanted it to go. Whether you're feeling confused, frightened, angry, or apathetic, I want you to know I'm here for you. I know a new diagnosis of Parkinson's can knock you for a loop, but consider this letter an invitation to a new chapter of your life - one that is much brighter than you may be imagining at this moment.

I think the tendency is for someone to say "I'm sorry" right about now, but I'm going to hold off on that lingo because I have a feeling you're likely not looking for sympathy. Instead, I want to offer my support. Please don't consider this a hand-out (I know you're not looking for that either) - **I just ask that you consider what I'm about to say with a brave and open heart.** Many people that I care about have stood where you stand now with questions, looking for hope. I've learned a lot watching them go through this process and, while I won't pretend to know all the answers, what follows is my best advice for the next chapter of your life...

#1 You are Not broken.

It may be your default to take this diagnosis as a sign that your [body is broken](#) or even revolting against you but **your body is simply telling you it needs serious TLC.** It's likely been telling you this for a while but up until now it's been easier to ignore than pay attention to. Today your body shouted loud enough for you to hear it so **now begins the journey of listening** and tuning in to what it's telling you. Your body is resilient and always seeking health and repair - [you just need to give it what it's asking for.](#)

#2 Your Future has Not been decided for you.

There will be naysayers and fear mongers, but a diagnosis of Parkinson's is just that - a diagnosis. It's a label for a collection of symptoms, not your prognosis or a crystal-ball prediction of what your future holds. **It's okay to believe you'll get better, not worse, and that you'll never need a wheelchair.** This isn't denial if this belief is paired with deliberate action on your part to improve your health and maximize your vitality. **Your future is in Your hands, no one else's,** and your [attitude is everything.](#)

#3 Don't Hide.

Your instinct is likely to hide your diagnosis and pretend all is well. The thought of walking into a Parkinson's support group may make you want to cry - after all, who wants to be face-to-face with a future they'd rather not confront? Luckily, Parkinson's symptoms aren't contagious!

Joking aside, **the Parkinson's community is incredibly strong and supportive and is an amazing resource.** Just because others present with certain symptoms doesn't mean that's your fate and learning from their experience is **valuable beyond measure.** Find a local support group, meet-up, or just another like-minded person with Parkinson's (PWP) who can act as a confidant through this process. There are many [online support groups](#) and you'll definitely be able to find one that matches your current situation and attitude. **Seek out resources that build you up and have a positive impact.** Remember, there is strength in numbers and no one can (or should) go at this alone.

#4 Start Exercising. Now.

The evidence is strong - regular exercise is neuroprotective (meaning it protects your brain) and promotes neurogenesis (meaning it helps develop new connections in your brain). The buzzword is **"neuroplasticity"** which means **your brain is always molding and changing** based on what you ask it to do. So, challenge it (mentally and physically) to change it for the better. The absorption and utilization of dopamine, the neurotransmitter that is lacking in Parkinson's, is significantly boosted with a challenging and frequent exercise regime. **The bottom line: You shouldn't miss a day of exercise in the same way you wouldn't miss a day of taking your medication.** Yes, it's that important! If you're not an exerciser.. well, you are now!

#5 Small changes = Huge difference.

Observe your diet. We swallow food just like we swallow pills - why expect that one will have an affect on your symptoms and the other will not? **Toxins** come in many forms - pesticides, hormones, pollution, food additives and sugar, to name a few - and [they burden your immune system and brain](#). **Eat as organic** and close to nature as you can afford. Explore supplements but realize you can't supplement away a bad diet. (Healthy) fats are your friend. Find activities that **calm your mind** and fill your soul - do them daily. **Meditate. Laugh. Prioritize sleep** - this is where your brain heals and flushes out toxins. Treating your body like a temple will [dramatically affect the way you move, think, and feel](#).

#6 Take Action Now. Don't wait.

You may feel you're "not that bad". Your symptoms are minimal and you feel you can pretend they don't exist and for a while, yes, you'll be able to go on as if nothing's ever happened. [Your urge to "stay normal" in the eyes of others for as long as possible is strong](#) - I get it. However, when it comes to Parkinson's **there is no waiting**, whether you have symptoms or not. Taking immediate action to uplevel your exercise program, manage your stress, regulate your sleep cycle, and overhaul your nutrition is crucial to preserving your precious brain and is the **only** option. Medication will help your symptoms and deep brain stimulation may reduce your tremors, but these are simply masking the dysfunctions in your system, not fixing them. **Very similar to the way money compounds in your bank account - not changing your habits now will only compound your problems down the line.** Starting today, put yourself first and make your health and future your top priority.

#7 Find Acceptance to Dissolve Fear

Accepting where you are is different than surrendering - **it inspires action** instead of passivity. [Embrace where you are in this moment](#). You may have heard the saying, “What you resist, persists”, so don’t push away your feelings. Instead, feel them fully. Cry.. Scream.. Laugh.. **By being here, right now, you’ll find that you’re OK.** Fear has no place here because you’re not in any immediate danger. The fear comes when you leave this moment and your mind floats into a fabricated future. **Stay present** and focus on what you can do in this moment. **I believe in you.**

With all my love and support,

Sarah

Sarah King PT, DPT

“ There is something you must always remember:

You are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think.

— Winnie the Pooh



With all my love and support,

Sarah

Dr. Sarah King, PT, DPT

Founder of Invigorate Physical Therapy and Wellness