



Why boxing for people with Parkinson's? Position Statement – Updated November 2018

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We know that exercise is good for everybody, and that as an exercise modality, non-contact boxing is one of the best. Boxing encourages the development of strength, agility, power, speed, endurance, hand eye coordination, reaction time, core strength, and overall mental well-being.

That said, there are additional benefits of exercise for people with Parkinson's, and some specific reasons why boxing is so effective for this population.

For people with Parkinson's exercise is literally medicine. From the point of brain health, it is neuroprotective, helping their brains push back against the disease process; it promotes repair and helps manage damage causing neuro-inflammation; it supplies brain tissue with oxygen; and it promotes neuroplastic changes that help mitigate the effects of Parkinson's. Exercise also helps people with Parkinson's directly address their movement challenges – for example if Parkinson's is making someone's body stiff and weak and as a result they become sedentary, they will get stiffer and weaker but if they exercise they will get stronger and more agile. Exercise helps people with Parkinson's maintain functional mobility and enables them to be able to do the things in their regular daily life that are important to them and help them live at home with the best possible quality of life. Exercise is empowering – when faced with an incurable degenerative condition, exercise gives people a way to be active, in control, and to make their journey with Parkinson's a better one.

Boxing based training directly addresses many of the main motor deficits people with Parkinson's face including difficulties with power, speed, agility, rhythm, size of movement, amplitude of movement, coordination, reactivity, balance, rotation, weight transfer, strength, and mobility – working on these things is already



part of boxing as an exercise modality. As a bonus the use of forceful expiration combined with punching is incredibly effective at supporting people with Parkinson's speech and for strengthening and protecting their breathing and coughing muscles. Boxing naturally utilizes accepted strategies for improving the movement of people with Parkinson's with its visual and auditory cuing, its' focus on large movements and forward reach, and the strong rhythmic component of boxing. Boxing is a great workout that can be adapted so that anyone can do it. Importantly, boxing it is still somehow fun even when challenging or done at high intensity, and being challenging and having a high intensity component are part of what promotes better brain health (in terms of promoting neuroplasticity and neuroprotection).

At Counterpunch Parkinson's, our boxers stop being people *with* Parkinson's, and start being people *fighting* Parkinson's. They get to do this with other people who are *fighting the same battle*. They are *empowered*; they are *getting better* when they are 'supposed' to be getting worse. They feel *hopeful* and *positive* instead of despairing. And sometimes, *in the face of something like Parkinson's, it feels mighty good to hit things*.

P.S. We must also clarify that boxing as an exercise modality doesn't contribute to increased risk factor of developing Parkinson's. There is an increased risk factor for Parkinson's associated with concussive head injuries. Counterpunch Parkinson's is non-contact boxing. Nobody is getting hit in the head in Counterpunch Parkinson's classes. By improving balance, agility, reaction time, and strength we are decreasing our boxer's risk of fall and therefore we are actually helping them protect their heads as well as their bodies!

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