

Dancing, in her own words



Kate Kelsall, a University of Colorado Hospital volunteer and DBS (Deep Brain Stimulation) Patient and Family Liaison, has shared her thoughts about why she prefers dance over other forms of exercise, and why dance is so useful in managing her Parkinson's symptoms. These are her words.

Methods: I use self-cueing to remember the steps and sequences. Certain words in the lyrics and certain musical instruments in the songs remind me that I should be at a certain place in the dance. Also, I make up names to remind myself of the step. For example, one step reminds me of the Statue of Liberty, and I named it such. Another dancer named a step "shaking the laundry" because it reminded her of that. My class in particular is made up of many retired teachers who have helped students learn by creative methods, using all of one's senses.

Focus: Dance helps me to focus. It is important to focus on the current dance step/sequence while at the same time asking myself what step comes next. It's a form of multitasking, which most of us with PD struggle with.

Visualization: Once I've learned a dance fairly well, I use mental rehearsal to solidify what I learned. Before bed, I visualize in my mind the entire dance with accompanying music. This only works if I already know the dance, otherwise I'm rehearsing errors in the movies of my mind.

Psychological benefits: Dancing and depression/apathy are incompatible. It's impossible for me to be depressed while dancing. In class, our focus is on dance, not personal problems.

Power of the Group: Most of the Rockyettes are in their 60s and 70s. Although it appears that out of the 50 dancers, I am the only one with PD, while some of the other dancers are going through serious health issues, e.g., cancer, rods in backs etc. We see ourselves as dancers, not patients. With the focus being on dance, I never think of or feel like I have PD when I dance. People tell me that they don't observe my PD symptoms when I dance. The experience that I have practicing my dance at home in the basement is entirely different from dancing with the group in the dance studio. Any feelings of loneliness and isolation dissipate immediately when I enter the dance studio. Also, not wanting to let the other dancers down motivates me to learn the dances.

Performing: One of the reasons I joined the Rockyettes was because the group frequently performs at different retirement communities and at various community events...For someone with strong performance needs such as me, dancing provides the perfect outlet.

