



Parkinson Association of Orange County

Improving Your Voice and Your Gait

Many people with Parkinson's Disease (PD) suffer from Hypophonia, a low voice volume and muffled speech. This condition results from a lack of coordination in the vocal musculature. Treatment generally includes vocal therapy that contains breathing exercises, muscle training exercise for vocal cords, and often singing or speech training. Music therapy can be a very pleasurable way to improve the condition. In fact, according to research done by Claudio Pachetti, MD, and others, music therapy led to a significant improvement in both Hypophonia and Bradykinesia, the abnormal slowness of movement that is also a symptom of PD. Not only did the therapy improve physical symptoms, but it also had a beneficial effect on emotional functions. The conclusion of the research done by the physicians in Dr. Pachetti's study is that music therapy is effective on motor and behavioral functioning. In fact, the study went so far as to recommend music therapy for inclusion in PD rehabilitation programs.

Music therapy has been found to be so effective in such a variety of conditions that it is commonly used as a treatment in the following types of care:

- Rehabilitation of handicapped children
- Geriatric care to improve social, psychological, intellectual, and cognitive performance
- Treatment of depression in children and adults
- Treatment of anxiety including use during surgical procedures
- Treatment of stress



The Tremble Clefs, a choral group whose members are people with Parkinson's and their partners

No wonder it is so useful for people with PD since they are often subject to depression, anxiety, and stress as a result of their condition. Add to that the fact that musical therapy is lots of fun and you have a win/win situation. Music therapy can be passive and might include listening to music, or active which often involves creating music. According to music therapist, Karen Skipper, no talent or past experience with music is required to experience the benefits of the therapy.

A study in the Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery, and Psychiatry by Gerald C. McIntosh and others also showed an improvement of gait in people with PD as a result of the rhythmic auditory stimulation provided by music therapy. Fortunately for people with PD, music therapy is readily available in Orange County. A quick search on Google reveals many firms offering private therapy sessions as well as programs sponsored by several local hospitals. The Parkinson's community also has its own musical group, the Tremble Clefs, specializing in music therapy at no cost to the participants. Karen Skipper, a board-certified music therapist and owner of Orange Coast Music Therapy, is the director of the group and Claudia Gambino, an amazingly talented pianist, acts as its accompanist.

"After being a caretaker for my husband who had Parkinson's Disease for about 27 years, I heartily recommend Tremble Clefs as a superb support group," says Martha Richardson who still attends the support group since her husband's death. "With a combination of good music, excellent direction, truly inspiring fellowship, and great exercise for the vocal cords, each person comes out of the session energized and better able to meet the challenges they face. Their voices are strengthened and any feelings of depression are lessened."

"When I first started my voice was low and barely understandable (one of the joys of Parkinson's)," says Bob Sickler. "But the music lessons, the singing and the voice exercises have turned my entire persona around. I look forward to our sessions together and to discovering new ways to improve my voice as part of the Tremble Clefs group. Far from a side benefit is the shock some of my friends exhibit when hearing my clear, stronger voice coming at them for the first time."

If you would like to improve the volume or quality of your voice and/or your gait, and if you would like to have some fun with fellow PD folks, relieve stress and feel an emotional uplift, check out the Tremble Clefs. They meet at the Florence Silvestre Center in Laguna Hills on Monday mornings at 9:30am.

For further information on the research referred to in this article go to the following URL: <http://mustherapy.narod.ru/386.pdf> <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC486690/pdf/jnnpsyc00001-0030.pdf> For further information on the Tremble Clefs, go to the following URL: <https://www.facebook.com/OCtrembleclefs>