

Parkinson's Disease & the Art of Moving, by John Argue

John Argue graduated from UC Berkeley with an MA in Dramatic Art. He spent 16 years teaching acting, voice, and improvisation. In the '80s he began working in the field of Drama Therapy with adults and children with disabilities. He began to focus on teaching movement and voice classes for people with Parkinson's Disease, developing training routines that "delay and reverse" the symptoms of the disease. He incorporates elements of yoga, Tai Chi, and Zen meditation. His soft-covered 221-page book was published in 2000. A video companion to his book was released in 2003.

His program is divided into 10 lessons. The first lesson is a warm up, done sitting, to be used to begin every exercise session. A tennis ball is used to warm up the feet, by rolling it with the soles. Then the ball is used to limber up the hands. Next he stretches the spine, reaching the arms overhead and bending forward trying to touch the floor. He gives detailed direction on the correct way to get back to the starting position.

He introduces the term "kinesthesia", which is an awareness of body position or movement, resulting chiefly from stimulation of sensory nerve endings in muscles, tendons and joints; he tells us to focus our attention on our kinesthesia during our workouts.

Voice and Speech is the title of the second lesson, which is a cooldown, done at the end of every session. He praises the value of yawning, whether natural or induced. It promotes the deepest possible diaphragmatic breathing; opens the throat for producing full volume speech; helps to strengthen swallowing; and relaxes the muscles while working out. We should sing AAHH while yawning. He demonstrates grimaces to stretch the facial muscles. "Lips, teeth, tongue and jaw" is repeated several times to improve articulation.

Next are floor exercises. Argue gives a detailed method for getting from chair to floor and one for getting back up. These may be helpful in learning how to prevent a fall or how to get up after a fall—he stresses the importance of learning to do these properly every time. While on the floor he rolls onto his back and does three exercises for the spine.

One chapter is on leg stretches (including how to get up from a chair), and another chapter on working on the hands and knees. "Standing Steady" is the title of Lesson 7. Argue discusses the importance of keeping the eyes focused on a spot across the room while doing an exercise, to reduce the chances of losing your balance.

Some of the moves come from Tai Chi and are called "Power Stances," which help to create a secure base with feet; legs and hips. The first stance is called *The Horse*. This pose is seen in many sports in which the athlete crouches slightly, hands open and arms somewhat in front; a shortstop poised to grab the baseball if it comes his way, the golfer addressing the ball, the tennis player waiting for the serve. The second power stance is *The Bow and Arrow*. An abbreviated description: Left foot forward, right foot back, left hand out over the left foot, right hand in front of waist, hands open wide, fingers curved.

These power stances help you to open and close heavy doors, and reach for something on a high shelf. When you feel yourself beginning to lose your balance, stepping into a power stance may save you from falling. Argue suggests working the two power stances into your daily tasks. When washing dishes set your feet in the "horse" stance and shift your hips from side to side as you reach to move dishes from counter to sink and back. Use "bow and arrow" when running the vacuum cleaner.

"Freezing" is a term referring to the temporary inability to move. Freezing often occurs in doorways or narrow spaces, but sometimes the trigger is unknown. Argue's advice: Stop trying to walk. Shift all your weight onto one foot—this frees up the other foot to move. Take your first step with this foot, heel forward, set the foot down at 20 degrees from center. Then step out, shifting your weight forward. Swing the other foot forward heel first, and walk off, heels first.

Argue recommends that as you walk, keep your focus of attention on what you are doing. He refers to this as mindfulness. People with Parkinson's don't multi-task very well. If your mind turns toward other things, your steps may become shorter and shorter and faster. The term "festination" refers to rapid short steps in Parkinsonism. Some people say that the person with PD is "condemned to a life of conscious actions" because of an impaired autonomic nervous system.

Many people with PD have difficulty turning. When they turn their head and shoulders in the direction they intend to go, this puts a lot of weight on the foot that needs to move first. Instead they should not turn the head or shoulder. Their weight should be shifted to the other foot away from where they want to go. The non-weight-bearing foot is now free to lead off, heel first.

