



HEALTH

05/24/2011 08:23 PM

Parkinson's Patients Treat Symptoms With Fitness Programs

By: Kafi Drexel



For many, a Parkinson's diagnosis has paved the path to Tai Chi, Pilates and Nia dance classes as innovative forms of treatment. NY1's Kafi Drexel filed the following report.

When 53-year-old Barry Adler was diagnosed with Parkinson's just over five years ago, the disease was already taking a toll on his body.

"I had symptoms leading up to it," says Adler. "My hands would be very hard. My handwriting, just to write across a piece of paper, you couldn't do it."

Adler and other New Yorkers living with Parkinson's are staying active through the Parkinson's Wellness Program. Family members and caregivers join them. The partnership between the Jewish Community Center in Manhattan and the NYU Parkinson and Movement Disorder Center offers fitness and educational programs from Tai Chi, Pilates, Nia dance classes and support groups.

"As a training professional, it is important for me to know that wherever I'm referring our patients they're going to a place that's safe, well-educated, and welcoming," says Amy Lemen, coordinator for the NYU Parkinson and Movement Disorder Center. "What we've really found here is a welcoming community for our participants."

The Nia class, a combination of dance, martial arts, yoga and other forms of movement is meant to help improve coordination. Participants say they can feel it having an impact.

"This class, they trick you into moving all your joints," says Pat Vega, who is living with Parkinson's. "You come to class and it's like you feel like you're at a party, you know? We sing, we dance, there's just no judgment. We just have a good time."

This program isn't just about recreation. It is also being used for research to see what the long-term impact might be on people living with Parkinson's.

"What we want to find out with Parkinson's is, will exercise prevent the disease from progressing? Will it slow it down?" says Caroline Kohles, senior director of health and wellness at the Jewish Community Center in Manhattan.

Based on what they say the program is already doing to alleviate symptoms, it seems like these participants are more than willing to find out.

"I feel more alive internally, more happy," says Adler. "I feel I can do anything I want to do."

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