



PANC

PARKINSON ASSOCIATION OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

UPDATE

Community for the Journey -- December 2025

PANC SUPPORT GROUPS HERE

If you would like to facilitate a group in your area, PANC will help.
Contact [Jen Westoby here](#) if interested.

The joy of brightening other lives, bearing each other's burdens, easing each other's loads and supplanting empty hearts and lives with generous gifts of love becomes for us the magic of the holidays.

-- W. C. Jones



Holidays Tips and Tricks

by Jennifer Westoby
Grass Valley Support Group Facilitator

December can be a fun and heart-warming time of year with family and friend get-togethers, holiday lights, worship services, and gifts. However, for some, especially those of us with Parkinson's, it can also be stressful and tiring. Several suggestions have helped me when this time of year comes around, and I hope the following ideas will also help you enjoy the holiday season with less anxiety/stress.

If you are visiting friends or family you haven't seen in a while and are concerned about what they might think of your symptoms, consider sending them an email or giving them a call (or asking your care partner to do so) to let them know how you are doing. For example, you might need space for a walker due to balance issues, have difficulty being heard because of a soft voice, or need longer to eat due to swallowing challenges or increased tremors. Sharing this ahead of time can help everyone feel more comfortable plus allow you to relax and enjoy yourself too.

If guests are coming to you, plan your preparations well in advance. A "to-do" list is always helpful, and don't hesitate to ask guests to bring a dish or find other ways to contribute. It's absolutely okay to delegate; friends and family members want to help with the preparation and activities.

If you are travelling, allow yourself plenty of time, carry your medication, and keep a current list of your prescriptions and medical safety forms ([easy to fill-in and printable](#)

[PANC forms are here](#)). Bring and keep filled a durable water bottle so you can take your medications and stay hydrated. Set alarms on your phone to remind you when it's time to take your meds too.

Whatever your plans, include time for exercise and fun; take a walk with the family, play ping pong or board games with friends, and nap or rest to recharge as often as needed. Do things at your own pace and show your loved ones what your version of self-care looks like. Above all, find gratitude in the gift of life and enjoy the festivities and camaraderie of the season. I wish a happy holiday to you and yours!

Make an End-of-Year Gift to PANC

Finding Connection & Mobility on A Climbing Wall

by Molly Donelan-Cupka
Up ENDing Parkinson's

Wall Climbing (including indoor rock climbing) is another joyful and empowering activity that is beneficial for people living with Parkinson's disease. With harness support, auto-belay, or bouldering on lower walls, climbing can be modified for ability, experience, and comfort level.



The sport taps into strength, balance, problem solving, and confidence in a way that feels playful as opposed to clinical. It meets individuals where they are, both physically and emotionally. A person with PD who is part of our climbing program called *Up ENDing Parkinson's* shared, "I feel strong again in a way I thought I had lost." Another said, "I always walk up to the climbing wall feeling unsure but leave feeling like I can take on the world!"

Climbing can be surprisingly beneficial for people with PD because it naturally targets many of the motor and non-motor challenges associated with the condition. Here's why it can be helpful:

- Improves balance and postural control
- Enhances coordination and motor planning
- Builds strength—especially the core and upper body
- Encourages large-amplitude movement
- Boosts flexibility and joint mobility
- Improves grip strength and hand function
- Supports cognitive engagement
- Reduces fear and builds confidence
- Encourages social and motivational benefits
- Adaptable for all levels

Many gyms and therapists now offer Parkinson's-specific climbing programs with most programs enrolling individuals who have never been climbing or to a climbing gym. Up ENDing Parkinsons is starting a program on January 14th for PWP through a partnership with Rocknasium Climbing and Fitness in Davis, should you be interested. Please let Dave Turnquist know if you'd like more info by contacting him via [email here](#). [Click here to register and learn more](#) about the Davis program. We have numerous other locations across the U.S too.

Thanks to donations, our climbing program is free to attend, with a small \$10 fee for shoe and harness rentals (unless participants choose to purchase their own gear). Click [here for more information about our program](#) and [click here for a short video](#) to see how it works. I hope you give climbing a try and know that a wall isn't the limit but just a starting place. Happy climbing!



Swallowing Problems in Parkinson's

Swallowing problems (called dysphagia) can be a cause of anxiety for people with Parkinson's disease. Early identification and intervention can help reduce risk, so it is important to watch for it and get treatment as early as possible.

What happens with swallowing in Parkinson's? Many people with PD experience changes in the muscles and reflexes involved in swallowing (mouth, throat, esophagus). Because of this, food, liquids, or saliva many go down the "wrong pipe" (i.e. into the airway/lungs) instead of the food-tube (esophagus) which is called "aspiration." Sometimes aspiration is silent, the person doesn't cough or choke noticeably, which makes it harder to detect and help.

Below are potential problems when swallowing issues aren't addressed:

- When aspiration occurs, it can lead to aspiration pneumonia: an infection of the lungs caused by inhaled food or fluid.
- Several studies show that swallowing dysfunction correlates with higher risk of hospitalization and higher mortality in Parkinson's.
- A cross-sectional study found people with Parkinson's had about 3.8 times higher risk of developing aspiration pneumonia compared to the general population.

Because swallowing problems are a manageable risk factor, it's important for people with PD and their caregivers/health-teams to:

- Monitor for early signs of swallowing difficulty (e.g., coughing during/after eating, long time to finish meals, frequent choking, change in voice when eating).
- Get evaluated by a speech-language pathologist or swallowing specialist if issues are suspected.
- Consider strategies or therapies (diet modifications, swallowing exercises, supervised mealtimes) to reduce the risk of aspiration.
- Ensure good oral hygiene and overall health (since infections in the mouth/throat can increase risk of lung infection after aspiration).
- Work with your neurology/PD care team to integrate swallowing risk into the overall care plan.

Equipment Exchange Products

PANC's Equipment Exchange has the following available:

- [U-Step Walker](#) -- Free
- [Full Electric 3-Function Hospital Bed](#) -- \$600
- [Bellavita Bath Lift](#) -- \$200
- [Theracyle 300](#) -- \$1,500
- [Merits Vision Sports Power Wheelchair](#) -- \$400
- [Over-Bed Trapeze](#) -- Free
- [Elenker Stand Up Walker](#) -- \$100

- [Alinker Walking Bike -- \\$900 obo](#)

If you have equipment to share that can help others, the new Durable Medical Equipment Exchange is open and ready to go. [Click here to post an item](#) and [here to see what's available](#). We want to see this benefit grow to help our Parkinson's community members through the various phases of their disease care.



The Parkinson's Disease Epidemic & Advocating for Solutions Featuring Dr. Ray Dorsey

Friday, January 30 from 7:00 - 8:30 pm
Corinthian Yacht Club, Tiburon, California

No fee to attend but limited seating

[Reserve your seat here](#)
[Event Flyer](#)

Leading up to the Sailing4Parkinson's Regatta, international speaker Dr. Ray Dorsey, a leading neurologist, bestselling author, and Parkinson's researcher, who is transforming how the world understands this condition, will be speaking at the Corinthian Yacht Club in Tiburon in conjunction with PANC.

All are invited to attend this special opportunity to hear him and ask questions. Dr. Dorsey spoke at the 2022 PANC Conference. Attendees described learning from him as eye-opening, emotional, and galvanizing. His talks often spark deep conversation, renewed purpose, and a shift from coping alone to collective action.

Coming from Rochester University in New York, Dr. Dorsey will share the groundbreaking perspective that as the fastest growing neurological disease in the world, Parkinson's is largely "man-made," driven not by fate, but by environmental factors we can change. His message is both urgent and hopeful, reminding us that with awareness and action, Parkinson's is a disease we can prevent and do something about now.

Parkinson's Policy Forum: You're Invited to Elevate PD Voices on Capitol Hill in Washington DC

On March 16 to 18, 2026 in Washington D.C, people with Parkinson's, family members, PD clinicians, and community servants, are invited to attend a Capitol Hill lobbying opportunity hosted by the Michael J. Fox Foundation Advocacy Team. The goal of this event is to encourage U.S. House and Senate members to understand what matters most to you in Parkinson's care and treatment. This event will also provide education on advocating for state and local Parkinson's initiatives.



Prior to the scheduled Capitol Hill meetings, attendees receive advocacy training and

inspiration. At the first MJFF Public Policy Event in 2025, advocates lobbied legislators for increased funding at federal agencies including the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and a ban on paraquat, the Parkinson's-linked herbicide.

[Click here for the event application](#). The recommended travel dates are March 15 and 18th or 19th. There is no cost to attend. If your application is accepted, MJFF covers lodging and a few meals plus has limited travel scholarships available. PANC President Harry Starkey will be participating, and we'd love to see a large NorCal contingent joining him. The more regional representatives and advocates, the louder our collective voice becomes for change. Seats are limited and registration closes February 6, so if you'd like to attend, register soon.



Canadian Odyssey: Toronto to Québec City

Road Scholar Caregiver Grants

Not-for-profit Road Scholar is the world's largest and most innovative creator of experiential learning opportunities. They have guided generations of lifelong learners on transformative learning adventures from San Antonio to Siberia, and nearly everywhere in between. Alongside renowned experts, participants in these adventures experience in-depth and behind-the-scenes learning opportunities by land and by sea on travel adventures designed for boomers and beyond.

The organization acknowledges the weighted responsibility carried by individuals who serve as family caregivers for ill or disabled relatives and are committed to helping offset the costs of arranging substitute care while you attend a Road Scholar learning adventure through their Caregiver Grants which can be applied to the cost of a Road Scholar program.

You may be eligible for a program grant if you are or were the primary unpaid caregiver providing daily care and support for an ill or disabled family member (spouse, parent, adult child, partner or sibling). To learn more about the non-profit, their adventures, and grants, [click here](#).

Local Magazine Features PANC Conference, PD Constituents, & Regional Services

[Click here to read](#) the recent Comstock's "Innovation Issue" featuring an article by James Raia about what's happening on the PD front in the region.

Comstock's magazine is a monthly business publication based in Sacramento, California, serving the Capital Region for over 35 years. It focuses on business insights and covers the region's community leaders and economic landscape.



Research Study Opportunity Cionic Neural Sleeve for

Mobility Assistance



Cionic is conducting a research study to test a medical device, their Neural Sleeve. The goal of the study is to confirm the safety and benefits of their device for people with Parkinson's who have difficulty with walking.

You may be able to join if you...

- Are an adult between the ages of 22 and 75 with Parkinson's disease
- Are able to walk with or without an assistive device
- Are located within distance to San Francisco
- Are willing to attend 3 study visits to the study site
- Have a smartphone or iPad that has internet access and Bluetooth capabilities

You are not able to join if you...

- Have limited/no response to electrical stimulation
- Have a history of daily falls
- Have a malignant tumor, existing thrombosis, or fracture/dislocation in the impacted or more impacted leg
- Have implanted devices or demand-type cardiac pacemakers or defibrillators

Participation is expected to range from 3 months to 1 year. During the 90-minute study visits, participants will complete walking tests with the Cionic Neural Sleeve, a tone assessment, and complete questionnaires about their medication, walking ability, and quality of life. The walking program will be completed at home, at least 3 days a week. Participants will receive a \$50.00 Amazon gift card for each study visit completed.

Want more information? Click for the [study flyer here](#) or reach the study team by email at trials@cionic.com.

December Free Webinars

Wednesday, December 17 at noon

My Parent Has PD: Am I At-Risk & What Can I Do? with PMD Alliance

The speakers will break down Parkinson's genetic risk factors, what the research suggests reduces risk, and actionable steps to take as preventative measures, with special consideration for the perspective of someone whose parent has Parkinson's. The speakers include Ray Dorsey, MD, MBA, Atria Health and Research Institute, co-author of "The Parkinson's Plan" and Maliah Grant, daughter of retired NBA player Brian Grant, who was diagnosed with young-onset Parkinson's at age 36

[Info and Register Here](#)

Thursday, December 18 at 9am

Stress and Parkinson's: Strategies to Manage the Strain with the Michael J. Fox Foundation
Hear a panel of experts share strategies on responding to stress and limiting its harmful effects.

[Register Here](#)

* Contact Jan Whitney [here](#) if you are interested in placing a sponsor article or research opportunity in this publication

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