

## **Exercise is Good for You – Parkinson's is not!**

*Stuart Rawlings*

When, at the age of 61, I was diagnosed with Parkinson's I realised that the world could change in seconds. Talk about a shock to the system. As most people do, I started to think about chair lifts and ramps, stopping work and the impact on my family.

Then came the reading stage and the coming to terms with the diagnoses. Clearly, I had a choice to make. Do I learn to live this thing or let it take over my life? Let's be clear – Parkinson's does NOT alter your life expectancy but can have a major impact on your quality of life.

So, what's out there to help me? Yes, there are drugs, which I know I'll have to take, but I've never been a big fan of filling my body with chemicals. And then there's the constant message of diet and exercise.

Now that's something I can work on!!

The diet part was easy; I've a fantastic partner who keeps me well fed with all the right things. I'm coming round to liking fruit and nuts! But the exercise bit was a little more difficult. I've always considered myself a relatively fit person but would never go to the gym. I don't find it easy to "get started" and can become anxious (which by the way is a symptom).

One thing I have always been is competitive: that could be at work, at home or at play. So, I needed to come up with strategy which would use that competitive edge to help fight off this Parkinson's thing.

The gym classes (which I now go to almost every day), umpiring hockey and exercising the dog worked well for me and I believe have slowed down the progression. But meeting others with Parkinson's proved two things.

Firstly, there are a lot of people out there with this thing and secondly not a lot of people know that!

So how does the Dragon Boat Race fit into this?

Well, it's competitive and fun, shows the world that we are normal people with a few extra challenges and, above all, promotes awareness. We might even persuade a few people to donate to our support group's work.

Will we win? No Way. But we are going to have a hell of a time trying!