

MORE THAN MOTION™

PARKINSON'S DISEASE. SHARE, LEARN, ACT.

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Parkinson's — on the — ROPES

Boxing delivers a one-two punch against a formidable foe.

For some people with Parkinson's disease, fighting their symptoms has taken on new meaning. Around the U.S., PD warriors are lacing up their boxing gloves and going more than a few rounds with the disease that threatens to limit their mobility. It seems that noncontact boxing may be an effective form of physical therapy.

Jorge L. Juncos, M.D., a movement disorder specialist at Emory University School of Medicine and the Emory Brain Health Center in Atlanta, discovered the benefits of non-contact boxing through his work with PD Gladiators, an organization that promotes fitness in people with Parkinson's. "Boxing gives you a vigorous workout and can alleviate PD motor symptoms as well as the secondary disabilities that come from aging or sedentary habits, such as acceleration of age-related stiffness and loss of joint and muscle elasticity," he says. "Through exercise, you can slow down symptom progression."

Improving Balance

The popularity of PD boxing classes has spread since the first program of its kind, Rock Steady Boxing, was introduced in Indianapolis in 2006. More than ten years later, there are hundreds of Rock Steady Boxing classes around the world.

In 2016, after a friend's uncle was diagnosed with PD, Scott Anderson, fitness coach and owner of Element Athletix in Meridian, Idaho, attended Rock Steady's training for instructors. He was impressed. "When they throw a combination of punches, it can improve concentration and can help prevent freezing," he says. Now, on weekdays, more than a dozen men and women in varied stages of Parkinson's do the 50-minute workout. Anderson and his trainers provide one-on-one instruction. He's found that boxing helps increase mobility both in and outside of class. If his boxers begin to freeze, Anderson calls out code words. "It helps change their thought process. If they get stuck outside of class, they can think of the code words to restart."

Confidence Booster

The effects of noncontact boxing on PD symptoms caught the attention of Pennie Seibert, Ph.D., a neuroscientist and chief research scientist at Saint Alphonsus Regional Medical Center and professor at Boise State University. "I've seen people come in using walkers and after they step onto the exercise area, they look like different people," she says. "The instructors teach participants a way to plant the feet and hold the body that provides greater stability."

Anderson's Rock Steady class is the subject of Seibert's clinical study on the efficacy of noncontact boxing therapy for PD. Although her research will not be complete until next year, initial findings are looking positive. "Not only does boxing seem to help the physical symptoms of PD but it also improves the sense of self," she says. "I've heard over and over again that people believe noncontact boxing has changed their lives."

"I'm a better person for it"

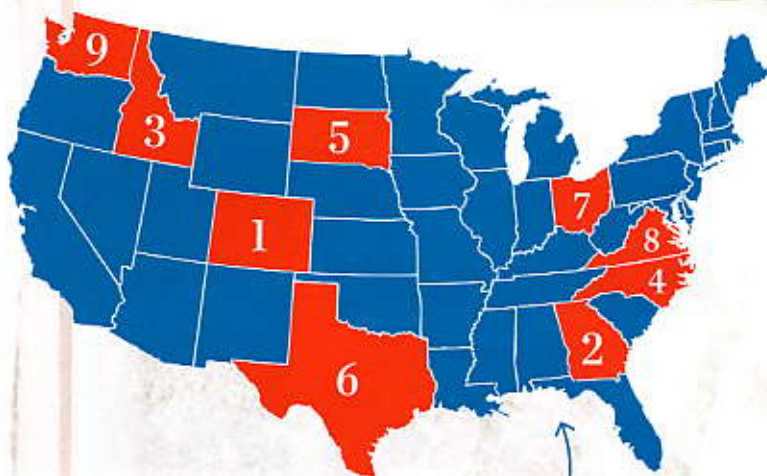
Allen Rabinowitz can attest to that improvement. He attends boxing training for Parkinson's disease at Delgado Boxing & Fitness in Atlanta, Ga. Rabinowitz was diagnosed with Parkinson's in 1999 at age 47. The loss of his ability to take part in sports was one of the frustrations he's faced over the years. Boxing put him back into the ring, literally and figuratively, and he's not looking back. "My hand-eye coordination has improved, and the footwork has helped my balance, plus I'm not as angry," he says. "I have a working body. It feels good knowing that I can do this."



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GALLOWAY



Pick a Fight

Here's a sampling of boxing classes around the country for people with Parkinson's. Consult your local PD organizations for more listings. To find Rock Steady locations in 44 states (and abroad!), search "Find a Class" at rocksteadyboxing.org.

- 1 Boulder, Colo.:** Power Punch Parkinson's Boxing at various locations, parkinsonrockies.org
- 2 Atlanta, Ga.:** Boxing Training for Parkinson's Disease at Delgado Boxing & Fitness, pdgladiators.org/atlanta-boxing-program
- 3 Meridian, Idaho:** Rock Steady at Element Athletix, elementathletix.com
- 4 Boone, N.C.:** Parkinson's Boxing Class at Paul H. Broyhill Wellness Center, wellness.apprhs.org
- 5 Hot Springs, S.D.:** Parkinson's boxing classes at Bodies in Motion, facebook.com/Bodies-In-Motion-1589601481303064/about/
- 6 Fort Worth, Texas:** Punching Out Parkinson's at Paulie Ayala's University of Hard Knocks Gym, punchingoutparkinsons.org
- 7 Toledo, Ohio:** Knock Out Parkinson's at International Boxing Club, ibctoledo.org
- 8 Springfield and Falls Church, Va.:** Boxing for Parkinson's at Title Boxing Club, titleboxingclub.com and parkinsonfoundation.org/virginia
- 9 Seattle, Wash.:** KO Parkinson's at Arcaro Boxing, arcaroboxing.com



PD Gladiators, left, is an organization devoted to battling Parkinson's with vigorous exercise.

