



# Corning Healthcare District

## ELDER SERVICES

### Newsletter

No. 19

Spring 2022

#### **APRIL IS PARKINSON'S DISEASE AWARENESS MONTH**

**What's the link between tulips and Parkinson's?**

**It's spring and flowers are bursting into bloom all around – including tulips.**

In 2005 the tulip was adopted as the official symbol of Parkinson's at the 9th World Parkinson's Disease Day Conference in Luxembourg, but the flower had been informally associated with the disease for more than 20 years prior to that. Back in 1980, a Dutch horticulturalist named J.W.S. Van der Wereld – who was living with Parkinson's – developed a new red and white variant of the tulip. He named his newly cultivated flower the Dr. James Parkinson Tulip in honor of the doctor who first documented the features of Parkinson's disease in his 1817 publication, *An Essay on the Shaking Palsy*. The Dr. James Parkinson Tulip is officially described as the "exterior being a glowing cardinal red, small feathered white edge, the outer base whitish; the inside, a currant-red to a turkey-red, broad feathered white edge, anthers pale yellow."

**Today wearing the red tulip raises awareness and shows support for people living with Parkinson's and their families.**



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**<https://www.corninghealthcaredistrict.org>**



**Corning**  
**Healthcare District**

Bringing Health Services to Southern Tehama County

## Improving Balance with Parkinson's Disease

~Shirley Engebretsen~

Parkinson's disease affects nearly 1 million people in America. There are approximately 60,000 new cases each year (AARP December 2021-January 2022, pg 40). The scientific cause of Parkinson's Disease is the loss of dopamine in the brain. Dopamine affects balance, movement and mood. The brain naturally produces this chemical so that you can walk safely with a friend and chatter about whatever is on your mind. You do not have to think about picking up your foot a little higher when your eye notices a rise in the sidewalk, or the need to step over a curb. Your movements are automatic and take no conscious effort. But when dopamine levels drop significantly, you may begin to stumble on cracks in the cement or not lift your leg high enough to safely step onto the curb. You may begin to notice one side of your body is much slower than the other, or notice stiffness in your arms, legs or neck muscles. Loss of dopamine can make it difficult to turn around sometimes resulting in a serious fall.

Fay Horace, Ph.D., PT Professor of neurology at Oregon Health & Science University of Portland and Jorvik Nonnekes, MD, Ph.D. report, "We've done studies showing that people turn, on average about a thousand times a day. (Brain & Life December 2021/January 2022 issue page 10). A low level of dopamine makes it difficult to change direction so that people with Parkinson's Disease must concentrate to move the muscles deliberately and maneuver safely.

Anouk Tossierams, M.D., Professor of Medicine at Radboud University Medical Center in the Netherlands, notes other difficulties in walking for people with Parkinson's Disease. He lists several techniques that a person can do to help walk and change direction safely. He suggests several internal and external cues to assist an individual in walking. For those whose steps suddenly become frozen (the individual has the sensation that his or her feet are paralyzed), several cues may be helpful, either to prevent the freezing or assist to unfreeze movement:

- The first Internal cue for walking is using an imaginary beat to pace your steps. Another internal cue that can overcome the freezing issue is before attempting to take any steps begin by saying in your mind, "ready, set, go" then step forward.
- External cues include walking to the beat of a metronome, or using a laser pointer to create a target on the ground. These tend to prevent the freezing. Some people find using walking poles or two walking sticks very helpful.
- Conscientiously widening one's turns helps to prevent falling. One interesting technique is to watch someone else walk and mimicking their gait. It might be surprising how effective this can be.

If you or someone you know has Parkinson's Disease and would like more information, go to [www.parkinson.org](http://www.parkinson.org) or [www.michaeljfox.org](http://www.michaeljfox.org). There is also a Parkinson's support group which meets once a month in Redding. For more information send an email to Kim Hawkins at [ricket2010@gmail.com](mailto:ricket2010@gmail.com).

### IN THE NEWS

**Over-the-counter hearing aids are coming!**

**Here's what you need to know:**

<https://www.ncoa.org/age-well-planner/resource/over-the-counter-hearing-aids-are-coming-what-older-adults-need-to-know>



- The Corning Healthcare District (CHD) Elder Services Program provides health and wellness education, workshops on cooking and nutrition, Medicare counseling through HICAP, Diabetes support, and information on a wide variety of issues relevant to seniors, including Parkinson's Disease, Alzheimer's, caregiving, falls prevention, personal and home safety, emergency preparedness, depression and mental health, suicide prevention, and end of life planning.\* We have assisted seniors with incontinence supplies, walkers, emergency food, and much more.
- CHD Elder Services also distributes the File of Life refrigerator magnet and personal-size cards free of charge to community members age 50 and over.
- \*Disclaimer: Elaine Benwell is not a medical professional. She provides information and support only. She does not diagnose, treat, prescribe, or give medical advice.