



**Breathing and sitting-to-standing exercises form part of the bespoke Healthy-Steps programme for Parkinson's**

## Little steps, big benefits

Janet Capstick, FFHT, explains how the Healthy-Steps™ programme can benefit those affected by lymphoedema and Parkinson's

**M**y business partner, Jackie Buller, FFHT, and I first met at Kidderminster College in 2004, when we were training to be therapists. A few years later, with several qualifications under our belts, we established a practice called The Timeless Partnership, offering a range of complementary therapy and rehabilitation services to clients in different settings.

In 2007, I was invited to speak about the benefits of complementary therapies to the Parkinson's UK Telford and Wrekin support group. From that first meeting, I became their resident therapist, supporting group members and their carers.

At the time, Jackie and I were also working with clients affected by breast cancer, a number of whom had developed lymphoedema. While manual lymphatic drainage was available from their specialist nurses, these clients often commented they were becoming more and more emotionally drained and depressed, as they felt they couldn't do anything themselves to help alleviate the condition.

While looking for a solution to this problem, Jackie and I came across an American wellness programme called the Lebed Method, which was developed in 1980 by two physicians and a professional dancer, Sherry Lebed Davis. Initially developed for breast cancer care and lymphoedema management, we were immediately impressed by the many potential applications of this programme, and travelled to Seattle to train as certified Lebed Method Trainers with Sherry.

Healthy-Steps, as it is now known, is an instructor-led exercise programme, which combines traditional physiotherapy with ballet, pilates and jazz movements. Music is also used to stimulate participants, helping them move more freely and direct their minds away from any pain or other limitations. The programme is aimed at distinct populations and is medically approved, monitored and reviewed annually.



**Janet with members of the Parkinson's UK Telford and Wrekin support group**



Having returned to the UK and successfully used Healthy-Steps with our clients affected by breast cancer and lymphoedema, it was evident the programme was going to be beneficial for many more clients recovering from, or affected by, a whole range of chronic and life-limiting conditions – including people with Parkinson's.

One great aspect about the Healthy-Steps programme is it can be adapted to suit any given client group, according to their specific health and well-being needs. Jackie and I worked together with members of the Parkinson's UK Telford and Wrekin support group to develop an innovative routine that would specifically address different aspects of Parkinson's disease and bring benefit to those living with the condition.

The bespoke routine we developed incorporates exercises that focus on balance, posture, breathing and getting from a seated to standing position. At the same time vocal cords are exercised by singing along to carefully selected music.

As well as the health benefits gained, group members particularly enjoy the invaluable social interaction of this fun programme.

Exercise is good for everyone and is especially important for people with Parkinson's, as muscles and joints become stiff and rigid. Problems with gait and balance are major causes of falls for people with this condition, and participation in an exercise/dance programme significantly improves and addresses such problems.

Other benefits for clients with Parkinson's following this routine include helping to maintain physical abilities, strengthening muscles, increasing joint mobility and building up their general health and fitness. All of this helps to improve their quality of life and to keep them independent for as long as possible.

The routine is proving popular with the falls clinic, as well as speech and language therapists, as it combines physical exercise with brain training and respiratory exercises, helping with breathing and speech. It has also recently won the Healthy-Steps International Dance Contest, an annual event challenging Healthy-Steps instructors across the world to produce a new exercise/dance routine. It was selected as the winning entry from programmes devised by nurses, physiotherapists, complementary therapists and dance instructors from countries including America, New Zealand, Korea and Canada.

As a result of winning this contest, Shropshire Radio interviewed me and members of the Parkinson's UK support group at their Healthy-Steps class and the story was covered on the Breakfast Show and also the Evening Drive Time slot.

The Healthy-Steps programme is both beneficial and enjoyable for clients, but its potential for improving our nation's health and well-being is huge.

- To learn about Healthy-Steps visit [www.fht.org.uk/rr/sharingzone/healthysteps](http://www.fht.org.uk/rr/sharingzone/healthysteps)
- To learn about a six-week pilot study carried out by Jackie and Janet involving 10 cancer patients with lymphoedema, visit [www.fht.org.uk/rr/research/healthy-steps/lymphoedema](http://www.fht.org.uk/rr/research/healthy-steps/lymphoedema)
- For more information about training, please see advert on page 63