

In Touch Newsletter **February 2025**

In the Spotlight: Northern Rivers Support Group

The area served by the Northern Rivers Parkinson's Support Group extends from Ocean Shores to Wollongbar. The Group meets in the township of Alstonville.

The Group Leader for the past five years, Cheryl Beerens, is in the process of handing over the reins to a new Leader. Cheryl cared for her father who lived with Parkinson's and dementia.

The Group is comprised of 65% people living with Parkinson's and 35% carers – many are couples. Attendance at meetings averages 30 people.

“When I accepted the role, I learned a lot on the job and gained satisfaction from being able to help people, get them information they need, and connect them with services,” said Cheryl.

The Group meets at a local café. Cheryl arrives early to decorate the tables with flowers or interesting seed pods.

“I do this set-up first, so the decorations give people something to talk about when they start to filter in at the beginning of the meeting,” said Cheryl.

“I don't directly address the group for the first 20 to 25 mins after our starting time but greet people individually as they arrive and help them settle at their tables. During this time, they all chat and catch up while having a cuppa. By the time I start my group welcome everyone is relaxed and have already got to know those sitting near them.”

“We then start the meeting with an Acknowledgement of Country and introductions of any guests. We are lucky enough to have two local Parkinson's nurses – Rebecca and Tim – who attend when they can.

“We then introduce our guest speaker, followed by Q&A time with the speaker and our nurses if they are present.”

Guests do not always present on Parkinson's-related topics. Thought is also given to what is important to the people that support them – be they spouse, carer, family, or friends.

Also at least once or twice a year the Group divides into people living with Parkinson's and carers for separate discussions. There are really useful conversations on these days. Usually, we have a Parkinson's nurse sit in with the people living with Parkinson's,” said Cheryl.

“On the occasions when we split the group, whoever is leading each gathering will ask everyone to say their name, where they went to school and what they used to do for work. I’ve found this is a great way to recognise that we all have history, and we are all more than ‘just a carer’ or someone living with Parkinson’s.

Our Group has included teachers, engineers, farmers, nurses, social workers, physios, fashion designers, sheriffs, builders, lawyers, artists, receptionists, academics, accountants, writers, ex-servicemen, deep sea divers, scientists, bus drivers and many, many more remarkable people.”

Another important part of the Group’s culture is acknowledging participants who may have passed away.

“We feel it is important to recognise everyone as part of our community, and to reassure participants that those who have passed will not be forgotten. We light a candle in their memory and acknowledge their passing by writing their name up on our board.”

Cheryl’s search for a new leader for the Group took more than a year, and several candidates were considered in the process. She considered the views of Group participants on who they would be comfortable with as their Leader.

“The main thing is to have someone who unites the Group and continues our approach of letting everyone participate. It’s not a role for telling people what to do but instead focusing on bringing people together and encouraging them to share,” she said.

Support Group Roundup

By Stacey Foster, Support Group Coordinator

Happy New Year everyone!

This year is already gearing up to be a big one. There are several Support Group visits planned, most of them in our regional areas.

The Parkinson’s NSW team is looking forward to visiting you, learning how your Support Groups run and sharing the latest news about Parkinson’s and Parkinson’s NSW. If you would like us to visit your Support Group this year, please let me know.

The major event on the Support Group calendar **this year is the Support Group Leaders Conference in Sydney on 2 April**. Leaders from 75 Support Groups are invited to come together to connect, share ideas and hear from guest speakers about volunteering and effective leadership.

This will be the first leaders conference since 2019, so it is very overdue, and we are looking forward to seeing our Leaders there!

April is also Awareness Month and this is a time where Support Groups like to consider how they'd like to raise Parkinson's awareness in their local community. Last year, groups participated in information stalls outside their local supermarkets, held high teas and art exhibitions, and ran an information expo, just to name a few.

If you would like to get involved this year, have a chat with your fellow participants and support group leader. The team at Parkinson's NSW also likes to support these events, so if you'd like us to attend, please don't hesitate to reach out (with plenty of notice!).

I'm looking forward to a fabulous 2025 with you all.

Do you need an MLAK key?

The MLAK (Master Locksmiths Access Key) is a universal lock and key system that allows people with a disability access to public facilities 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

This includes wheelchair accessible toilets and Liberty swings, facilities in National Parks and many Council municipalities, elevators at railway stations, and the new [Changing Places](#) facilities throughout Australia.

Users of MLAK keys will also find the National Public Toilet Map useful. It is a free web site and application that shows the location of more than 22,000 public toilet facilities across Australia.

This is useful map for all Australians when they are moving around the community – especially people with incontinence, travellers, or young families. Find it at <https://www.toiletmap.gov.au/>

A limited number of Master Locksmith Access Keys (MLAK) are available at \$25.00 including GST and postage.

The order form can be accessed at [MLAK order form – Master Locksmiths](#) or check with your local council if they have MLAK keys available for purchase.

This is part of the National Continence Program in partnership with [Continence Australia](#).

Ten self-care strategies

Stress affects nearly everyone at some point and over time. It can lead to serious health issues like heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes. Practicing self-care regularly can help you relieve stress and boost your health. There are a few major goals of self-care methods:

- Check in with your mind and body. Self-care allows us to check in with ourselves and attune to all parts of our being that may need some extra attention — mind, body, and spirit.
- Rest and recharge. Self-care is also an opportunity for us to recharge, replenish, and renew after a period of hard work.
- Bring the focus back to yourself. We find ourselves so often pouring into other's cups (family, work, partners etc.) that we forget ourselves. Each time you practice self-care you are telling yourself 'I am important'.

With those goals in mind, here are ten tips for practicing self-care to live a happy, healthy life.

1. Declutter your space

Your environment will impact your mental health. This means that being in a clean, organised environment can help you feel calmer and more focused. This may be especially helpful if you work from home, but it's also nice to simply relax in a clean, decluttered room. When things are already chaotic in our brains, visually seeing things as chaotic doesn't help either. Try your best to organize your space in the best way you can.

2. Meditate

Meditating has so many spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical benefits. For example, meditation can give your brain a chance to rest and recharge, using techniques like being aware of the present, checking in with your body and focusing on your breathing. All of these techniques support balance, grounding, and reduction in anxiety and depression symptoms. A 2014 review found that people who participated in mindfulness meditation programs saw improvements in their symptoms of anxiety, depression, and to a lesser extent stress.

3. Go for a walk or run

Going for a walk or run is a great option for daily self-care because it gives you a chance to go outside, get fresh air, and move your body. A 2015 review of seven studies found that aerobic exercise, like walking or running, can reduce anxiety symptoms for people with anxiety disorders. This may be because doing aerobic exercise releases endorphins in your brain, which can boost your mood.

4. Say no

It's easy to get into a pattern of always saying yes to social plans, extra work activities, or other people's requests, even if you don't have enough time or energy to really engage. Saying no to certain obligations can help free up time for yourself — self-care requires that we reserve enough time for the activities and relationships that are deeply replenishing. If we fill our calendars with things we dislike, we don't have enough room for the things that truly bring us joy.

5. Go on a weekend trip

When you're used to following your busy daily routine, it's easy to get burnt out and not notice. Weekend trips can provide a much-needed change of pace and the visual shift in scenery can offer a kind of newness that inspires creativity, wonder, and openness. It can be hard to find time or money for a full vacation, but even a short trip to the next town over or to a nearby nature reserve can help you feel renewed and boost your energy upon return.

6. Spend time in nature

Taking a walk in a natural environment like a forest or a park can help clear your mind and act as a reset during the day.

7. Do yoga

Yoga is a great self-care tool because it encourages mind, body, and spirit alignment. Yoga can help decrease anxiety and depression symptoms. This is because yoga can help reduce overactivity in your nervous system and regulates the stress hormone cortisol. Yoga is extremely beneficial for all those who wish to deeply connect to their bodies while being meditative and present.

8. Try journaling

Writing in a journal can be a great way to slow down and connect with your thoughts and feelings. And it doesn't take long to see results. Here are a few journaling techniques you can try:

- Write a list of things you're grateful for.
- Write down all your negative thoughts and feelings, then throw away the paper.
- Write down how you feel each day, then look back at your entries to see patterns in your mood.
- If you don't know what to write, just write any thoughts that come into your head, no matter how minor.

9. Eat fruits and vegetables

When you're especially busy, it can be easier to grab the quickest or easiest foods to eat, which are often pre-packaged and not the healthiest. Taking a moment to make yourself a fresh fruit bowl or chopped veggies can give you a boost of nutrients like anthocyanins that boost brain function. Eating raw fruits and veggies like carrots, bananas, and spinach helps to decrease depression symptoms.

10. Watch something funny

If you spend a lot of free time reading grim news stories, taking a break to watch a funny show or clip can be a great self-care tool. Laughing feels good emotionally, but it's also good for your physical health. Some of the benefits of laughter include:

- Calming your stress response
- Decreasing your blood pressure (after a short-term increase while you laugh)
- Relaxing your muscles
- Increasing your blood circulation

Source

[EAP Assist](#) (Employee Assistance Program)

Participate in the Natural history of Parkinson's Disease study

Neuroscience Research Australia (NeuRA) is conducting a Natural History of Parkinson's Disease study. There is an opportunity for 100 people living with Parkinson's and 50 individuals without Parkinson's (who would make up a control group) to participate.

This study is an opportunity to contribute to research that could lead to breakthroughs in Parkinson's treatment and care.

Sign up for the study by completing the form found

here: <https://forms.gle/fHnj3BnKsKjgM48v5> or email clinics@neura.edu.au to express interest, ask questions and obtain further information.

Find out more by clicking this link – [Take Part in Research](#)

2025 Parkinson's NSW Research Symposium

Parkinson's NSW is hosting a free Parkinson's Symposium at the Masonic Centre Sydney on Thursday 3rd April 2025.

This symposium will bring together key scientists and clinicians from around Australia to discuss the latest developments in Parkinson's research, and how they are shaping care and treatments today.

You will have the opportunity to connect and learn about the latest developments in Parkinson's. Key topics will include:

- The recent discovery of Parkinson's biomarkers and how they influence research and our understanding of Parkinson's
- Understanding the role of medication re-purposing for future treatments
- Understanding the role of exercise in neuroprotection (slowing the progression of Parkinson's)

Date: Thursday 3 April 2025

**Location: Masonic Centre Sydney
66 Goulburn Street, Sydney**

Space is limited and registration is required.

To register and find out more information head to the Parkinson's NSW website
<https://www.parkinsonsnsw.org.au/2025-parkinsons-nsw-research-symposium/>

Insight into Parkinson's presented by PD Warrior

The Parkinson's online conference will be online 11-13th April 2025. Parkinson's NSW is a proud charity partner and as Support Group participants you have the opportunity to purchase premium tickets at a 20% discount. Use the code PNSW20 by March 11th

For more information visit this website [Insight into Parkinson's](#)

For evidence-based information and advice call the Parkinson's NSW InfoLine

(02) 8051 1900

Parkinson's NSW InfoLine

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