Dance can help to ease muscle tension as well as lifting mood

This is useful because stress and tension exacerbate symptoms dramatically. Dancing leaves us all smiling, and we return home re-energised and ready to deal with the realities of life with Parkinson’s.

Because the social element is so beneficial, the online training programme emphasises the importance of working with friends and carers, as well as with people with Parkinson’s. According to Parkinson’s UK: “Some people find gentle exercise, including dance, can help them to move with greater ease and gain some relief from symptoms, as well as improving mood. The social benefits of being active and doing something enjoyable with others can be just as important.”

Leatherdale has seen these benefits first hand. “By giving people with Parkinson’s an opportunity to dance, you give them confidence in their own bodies. I’ve met people who have thought, ‘I’ve got a movement disorder - I can’t move any more.” But by concentrating on a clear beat, rather than the physical act of moving, shuffling can, temporarily, turn back to walking. Then people can take what they’ve experienced into their day-to-day lives, for example by wearing headphones and listening to music with a beat while they’re out shopping.”

Imagery used in dancing can really help too. “Instead of saying to someone, ‘put your arms out and move them around in a circle, we might say, pretend your hands are tracing ripples on water,’” says Leatherdale. “By focusing on the image rather than the action, it becomes a lot easier. With Parkinson’s, you can lose a lot of facial expressions, but one of the best things is seeing the joy that emerges when people with Parkinson’s rediscover the delight that dancing with other people can bring.”

Joyce Place has been attending lessons in Plymouth for the past two years: “Dancing is the opposite of life with Parkinson’s, which I find is a slow, depressing slog - like walking through treacle. The tight muscles remind me of new knicker elastic with little give. But when I hear the music, the muscle tension eases and my mood lifts. I am doing what normal people do: socialising, making physical contact, using my brain to learn new steps. And my body gets a healthy boost with a much wider range of movements than it would get during the course of my day.”

Tickets are now on sale for Shake with Laughter for Parkinson’s UK at the Comedy Store, London on 19 October. For information, go to parkinsons.org.uk/content/shake-laughter