

## Tips and Advice for People with Parkinson's

Article by Louise Lim, Speech and Language Therapist for [Playing for Cake and Recommunicate Speech](https://recommunicatespeech.co.uk/)  
<https://recommunicatespeech.co.uk/>

In my work I have met many people with Parkinson's who say that others are struggling to hear them when they speak. In some cases they have noticed a decrease in the volume of their speech, in other cases it is not apparent to them but only to those listening. In either scenario it is frustrating for both parties and can lead to breakdowns in communication including reduced attempts to communicate by the person with Parkinson's, abandoned conversations, a sense of loss of identity and even a distancing in the relationship.

In addition to low volume many people with Parkinson's experience reduced clarity of speech (often described by others as mumbling), repetitions of speech that can sound a bit like stammering, an unusually fast or slow speaking rate and a hoarse sounding voice.

These difficulties can be significantly improved with speech therapy exercises! They often include work on breath support, over-articulating and projecting the voice.

### **If someone is struggling to hear you:**

- Imagine they are across the room from you and you must send your voice all the way over to them.
- Imagine the other person is lip reading so you need to exaggerate all of your mouth and tongue movements to show them what you are saying.
- Speak with intent and feeling - as if you are an actor delivering lines on stage

### **Try the following exercises:**

- Become aware of your breath as the powerhouse for your breathing. Place your hand on your the lowest part of your belly. Pull your belly in as if your trousers were too tight then release. The muscles that you feel moving when you do this are the ones that you want to use for breathing when you need to project your voice.
- Breathe out, take a good breath in then count up from 1, see how high you can count to whilst maintaining good volume and clarity. See if you can extend how high you can count to over time.
- Warm your voice up every day and before social interactions by saying 'aaah' or 'haaaah' as loudly and clearly as you can 5 times. Also try saying 'me my may mo moo' loudly and clearly 5 times.

***The best way to improve is to practise regularly - at least once a day if not twice.***

There are some voice exercise videos online and CDs and DVDs available from a speech therapist called Mary Spremulli who is based in the USA. Mary also sells a light-up bracelet to indicate when the speaker's voice volume is loud enough. See <https://voiceaerobicsdvd.com>

If you don't feel able to do regular voice exercises for any reason, another option is to purchase a personal amplifier which is essentially a small microphone and speaker that you wear. Note this only helps with volume and not clarity of speech articulation. See the shop section of the Parkinson's UK website <https://www.parkinsons.org.uk>

And last but absolutely not least - do come along to a Skylarks singing session (see <http://playingforcake.uk> for more details! When we sing we naturally tend to project and over-articulate so it is great practise for using your voice loudly and clearly.