



A place to play, connect and forget about Parkinson's for a while

Themes: long term health conditions, connecting communities

Lewes and District Parkinson's UK Support Group began in 2016, providing local activities, drop-in sessions and support for people living with Parkinson's and their families. After a consultation to discover what activities members would like, table tennis came out on top. Since table tennis launched in spring 2025 members have experienced significant social and physical benefits.

Background

In 2023 Clare Carroll came across a table tennis table in a park. Intrigued, she grabbed a bat and found she could play the sport – something which excited her tremendously after struggling to participate in other activities due to her Parkinson's.

"It was astonishing, generally when you're hunched in a wheelchair to suddenly get up and realise you can smack a ball about with a bit of oomph was really quite nice".

Clare

Lewes and District Parkinson's UK Support Group conducted a consultation with its members, who placed table tennis at the top of their wish list for activities to offer. The group were successful in receiving a £3,000 grant from Parkinson's UK to establish the sessions, using the funding to purchase equipment packages through Table Tennis England's *Ping in the Community* scheme, as well as covering hire costs for a local church hall.

The Project

Since sessions began in March 2025, around 20 people regularly attend the weekly sessions, held on a Tuesday for 1.5 hours. The sessions are also supported by a group of volunteers, some of which have partners who play table tennis in the group, make cakes and serve refreshments from the hall's kitchen.

Sessions are free to attend, although donations are welcome, and feature casual game play with a singles table and doubles table. Players rotate after 10 minutes, with regular breaks offered. Paul, a local table tennis player, often attends the session and provides basic coaching advice, as well as occasionally running small competitions for part of the session.

"People who could hardly hit the ball, as they get more confident, their mobility seems to be better on the table. They can play to a level where they get enjoyment from it".

Paul

The Impact

The social impact of the table tennis sessions is significant for everyone involved. The sessions have created a sense of community and provided a support system for both participants with Parkinson's as well as their families.



After moving to Lewes 30 years ago from America, Carol is grateful for the people she's met through the table tennis sessions.

"It's a very joyful experience; the people I've met are brilliant... I've made a lot of new friends here. I think anything that brings joy is a good thing".

Carol, participant



"I like to come and meet all the people and play, everybody's so friendly. My daughter often says when I come back from the sessions that I look much better and fresher – and I do feel it".

Raka, participant

Nigel played table tennis in school but dropped out of the sport for 50 years. After finding out about the Parkinson's table tennis sessions around a year after his diagnosis, Nigel is enjoying playing again and is taking opportunities to play more competitively in both domestic and international Parkinson's events – even winning a medal at a French event in September 2026.



"One of the issues I think when you get diagnosed with any disease, is you get very depressed at first, you don't quite know what to do. I've realised you should have projects in life and adventure, and somehow this has been a good project for me to do and it's an adventure – it keeps the spirits up".

Nigel, participant

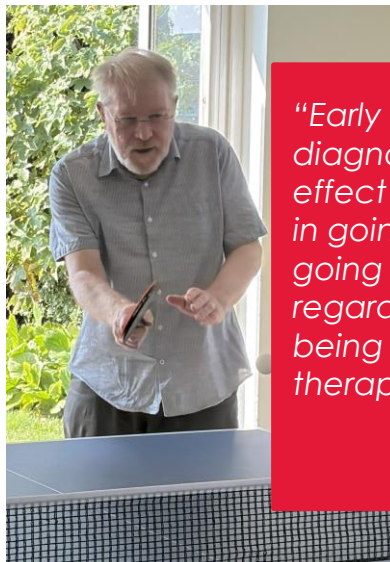


"I love table tennis because you don't think about Parkinson's for a bit, you just think about the ball going over the net – it's lovely. It makes a huge difference to our week, I hope I'll be able to carry on playing for quite a long time".

Liz, participant

Roy was diagnosed with Parkinson's in 2024 whilst being examined for other health issues. After his diagnosis, Roy didn't leave the house much and became socially isolated. Now Roy attends the table tennis sessions each week and has been coming for over a year, as well as participating in other exercise classes and other social opportunities.

Roy's wife Gwyneth, who supports the sessions, notes the positive impact table tennis has provided;



"Early on after my diagnosis, I had in effect lost confidence in going out and going places... I regard table tennis as being a key part of my therapy".

Roy, participant

"The thing I noticed straight away was the camaraderie and giving them the chance to get up and play. Once they're at the table everything disappears, people who are quite disabled become quite competitive once they're up there! It's so nice and it's really helped, Roy will now say, 'I want to go!'. For a long time he didn't do anything, this has given that back to us".

Gwyneth, supporter and Roy's wife

"It's just freeing, you suddenly find you can move when you didn't think you could. I've seen people come in tremulous, looking worried and nervous, and they've played and they've gone out with a smile on their face and tears in their eyes".

Clare, participant and session leader



Clare has experienced the impacts of table tennis from both a session leader and a participant point of view. She references how being able to move and play a sport with a condition like Parkinson's is incredible, alongside the elation she sees from others who experience the same feeling.

Players at the session have various ambitions for the future, some including participating in more competitions and improving their skills, whilst others simply want to continue playing the game for as long as they possibly can.