NeuroGems
EMPOWERING HEALTH

LIVING WELL

with Parkinson's and MS

Your NeuroGems guide to four daily pillars:

Nourish, Move, Calm and Rest

Understanding your brain and body · Finding your why

Nourish · Move · Calm · Rest

Your 8-week plan · Trackers and worksheets

NeuroGems · Empowering Health

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Welcome to the NeuroGems family

You may have Parkinson's or MS, but it doesn't have to have you.

A diagnosis can feel like everything is out of your hands. This handbook is about the parts that are in your hands: what you eat, how you move, how you calm your nervous system, and how you rest. Small choices in these four areas, made every day, add up to real changes in how you feel and function.

Everything here is simple on purpose. You don't need to do it all. Start with one pillar, choose one small step, and build from there. Your NeuroGems team is with you along the way.

How to use this handbook

Read Part 1 first A short, plain-language look at what is happening in your brain and body, and why these four pillars help.	**Find your why** Part 2 helps you get clear on what you want and why it matters to you. This is what keeps you going.
One pillar at a time Each pillar ends with a "Start here" box. Choose one step, not all of them.	**Follow the 8-week plan** Part 4 takes you through one focus each week, with a simple tracker to tick off.

> **An important note**
> This handbook supports, and does not replace, your medical care. Keep taking your medications as prescribed, and check with your doctor or NeuroGems practitioner before starting a new exercise program, supplement, or major change in diet.

What's inside

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Part 1: Your brain and body

UNDERSTANDING WHAT'S HAPPENING

Knowing why something helps makes it much easier to keep doing it.

What is neurodegeneration?

Neurodegeneration means nerve cells (neurons) slowly losing their structure or function. In **Parkinson's**, the cells that make dopamine are affected, which changes movement, mood, digestion, and more. In **MS**, the immune system attacks myelin, the protective coating around nerves, which slows the signals travelling along them.

In both conditions, **inflammation** plays a big part. That's encouraging, because many everyday choices can calm inflammation down.

The gut–brain connection

Your gut and brain talk to each other all day, mainly through a long nerve called the **vagus nerve**. Trillions of bacteria in your gut (your microbiome) help with digestion, make important substances for the body, and protect the gut lining.

When the gut is healthy	When the gut is struggling
A varied, well-fed microbiome keeps the gut lining strong, calms the immune system, and supports the brain.	Processed food, sugar, chronic stress, poor sleep, and toxins can weaken the gut lining. This can lead to inflammation that reaches the brain.

This is why caring for your gut is one of the first steps in caring for your brain.

Stress and your nervous system

Your nervous system has two main modes:

Rest and digest	Fight or flight
Your body repairs, digests, heals, and sleeps well. This is where we want to spend most of the day.	Your body releases stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline, raises inflammation, and shuts down digestion. Useful in an emergency, harmful when it never switches off.

Chronic stress keeps the body stuck in fight-or-flight. Stress doesn't only come from worries. Blood sugar swings, poor sleep, processed food, and chemicals in everyday products are stressors too. The four pillars work together to bring your body back to rest and digest.

Your brain can change

For a long time, people believed the adult brain was fixed. We now know the brain keeps forming new connections throughout life. This is called **neuroplasticity**. Think of your brain's networks as roads: when one road is blocked, the brain can build a detour. The more roads you build through movement, learning, and new experiences, the more options your brain has.

> **The big idea**
> Movement, nourishing food, a calm nervous system, and deep sleep all help the brain protect itself and build new pathways. You are not powerless. What you do each day matters.

Part 2: Finding your why

EVERY CHANGE STARTS IN THE MIND

Lasting change doesn't come from willpower alone. It comes from knowing what you want and why it matters to you.

Step 1: Picture your vision

Imagine yourself a year from now, feeling as well as you possibly can. How do you feel when you wake up? What are you eating? How are you moving? What are you doing with your day, and who are you spending it with?

Put it on paper: a vision board with pictures and words that speak to you, or a simple, colourful list of your goals. Keep it where you'll see it every day.

Step 2: Decide and commit

"I'll try" leaves the door open to not doing it. Deciding is different. When you commit, it becomes a priority, and you find a way. Start small, but decide.

Step 3: Turn around the thoughts that hold you back

We all have thoughts like "Why bother, it never works for me" or "I'm too tired." These self-imposed stops keep us stuck. Notice them, write them down, and turn each one into a new statement.

Instead of...	Try...
"I'm so tired, I can't exercise."	"Moving gives me energy. I can start with five minutes."
"Nothing I do will make a difference."	"Every healthy choice supports my brain and body."
"This diagnosis defines me."	"I have Parkinson's (or MS), but it doesn't have me."

Step 4: Find your why

Your why is the real reason you want to feel better. It might be dancing at a grandchild's wedding, staying independent, or being present for your family. Ask yourself:

- How do I want to feel?
- Why does my health matter to me?
- What will be possible when I feel better?

Make it easier on yourself

Stack your habits Link a new habit to something you already do. "After I brush my teeth, I'll do 5 minutes of stretching."	**Start small** A tiny habit you do every day beats a big one you do once.
Add the good A walk with a friend, an uplifting class, a good book. Surround yourself with people and things that lift you.	**Find a partner** Choose someone to check in with each week. Accountability makes a big difference.

My commitment

I, _____, on _____, have decided to step into my vision of _____.

My why: _____

I'm saying YES to: _____

I'm saying NO to: _____

Part 3: The four pillars

NOURISH · MOVE · CALM · REST

Each pillar supports the others. Good sleep makes it easier to move; movement lowers stress; calm digestion helps you absorb your food. You don't need to master them all at once.

Pillar	Why it matters	Start with
Nourish	Food feeds your cells, your gut bacteria and your brain, and can calm or fuel inflammation	Add one colourful vegetable to lunch and dinner
Move	Exercise is food for the brain. It builds strength, balance, and new brain pathways	A 10-minute walk every day
Calm	Calming your nervous system lowers inflammation and supports digestion	2 minutes of belly breathing, twice a day
Rest	Deep sleep is when your brain clears waste and repairs itself	Same bedtime and wake time every day

Pillar 1: Nourish

FOOD AS MEDICINE

Every meal is information for your body. The right foods calm inflammation, feed a healthy gut and give your brain what it needs.

> This is a short overview. Your NeuroGems nutrition handbook goes into much more detail, with symptom tips, shopping lists, and recipes.

The NeuroGems way of eating

We follow an anti-inflammatory, mostly plant-based way of eating, guided by the research of Dr. Laurie Mischley and Dr. Terry Wahls. In Dr. Mischley's study of people living with Parkinson's, those who ate more fresh vegetables, fresh fruit, nuts and seeds, olive oil and non-fried fish tended to progress more slowly.

Add in	Leave out
Colourful vegetables and fruit, especially leafy greens, berries and broccoli · wild salmon and other non-fried fish · nuts and seeds · olive oil and avocado · beans and lentils · fresh herbs, turmeric, ginger and garlic · fermented foods such as sauerkraut and kimchi · plenty of water	All dairy (milk, cheese, yogurt, butter, ice cream) · refined sugar and sweetened drinks · processed packaged foods · fried foods · poor-quality oils such as canola, corn and soybean · and work toward gluten-free (wheat, barley, rye): it's the anti-inflammatory ideal, so make it your goal or try a 3–6 month gluten-free trial and notice how you feel

Five simple habits

1. **Eat the rainbow.** Aim for different colours of vegetables and fruit every day. Variety feeds a variety of gut bacteria.
2. **Choose fresh first.** Make fresh produce the base of your meals and keep frozen as a backup. Choose organic for the Dirty Dozen when you can and wash produce well to cut down on pesticides, some of which have been linked to Parkinson's.
3. **Have fish two to three times a week.** Wild salmon, sardines and other fatty fish are rich in omega-3 fats.
4. **Feed your gut.** Add a spoon of sauerkraut or kimchi, and eat prebiotic foods such as onions, garlic, leeks, asparagus and bananas.
5. **Steady your blood sugar.** Include protein, fibre and healthy fat at each meal instead of sugary or white-flour foods.

For MS: ask your practitioner to check your vitamin D level, which is especially important in MS. **For Parkinson's:** if you notice protein affecting how your levodopa works, see the nutrition handbook for timing tips.

> **Start here (pick one)**
>
> - Clear out one cupboard of processed snacks and replace them with nuts, seeds, and fruit.
> - Swap your milk for almond or oat milk this week.
> - Add one extra vegetable to lunch and dinner.
> - Have salmon or another fish twice this week.

Pillar 2: Move

EXERCISE IS FOOD FOR THE BRAIN

Movement may be the single most powerful thing you can do for your brain. Use it or lose it applies to the brain as much as the body.

Why movement matters so much

Builds the brain Exercise releases BDNF and GDNF, natural growth factors that protect brain cells and help them form new connections. BDNF has been called "Miracle-Gro for the brain."	**Boosts dopamine** Movement helps dopamine cells work more efficiently, which lifts mood, energy, and motivation.
Protects strength and balance Muscles that aren't used weaken. Regular exercise keeps you stronger, steadier, and more independent.	**Movement makes more movement** The more you move, the easier the next movement becomes, and the more energy you have.

A balanced week of movement

A good routine includes four kinds of movement. A physiotherapist or trainer who works with Parkinson's or MS can tailor a plan for you.

Type	Why	Ideas
Stretching	Eases stiffness and keeps joints moving	Gentle morning stretches, yoga
Balance	Lowers the risk of falls	Tai chi, standing on one foot holding a counter

Strength	Protects muscle and independence	Sit-to-stand from a chair, light weights, resistance bands
Cardio	Strengthens heart, lungs and brain	Brisk walking, cycling, swimming, dancing

Think big

Parkinson's tends to make movements smaller, and MS can weaken muscles. Large, bold, full-range movements help retrain the brain and body. Try:

Tai chi Slow, controlled movement for balance and coordination.	**Dancing** Rhythm, joy and coordination all at once.	**Yoga** Flexibility, balance, body awareness and calm.	**Water exercise** Strength and flexibility with less strain on joints.

Ask your physiotherapist about programs designed for Parkinson's, such as LSVT BIG, or MS-specific classes. Activities where you learn a skill are especially good for the brain: boxing classes, table tennis, tennis, dance, tai chi and qigong. Intensity matters too. In one study, people with Parkinson's who did high-intensity exercise showed no worsening of movement symptoms over six months, while those who didn't exercise worsened by about 15%. Build up gradually with your physiotherapist.

Brain retraining: a daily brain workout

New experiences build new brain pathways. These "neurobic" exercises take just a few minutes. Choose one or two each day and keep changing them.

Exercise	How to do it
Use your other hand	Brush your teeth, stir your tea, or write a sentence with your non-dominant hand.
Change your route	Take a different path on your walk, or rearrange where you keep everyday items.
Read aloud	Read a paragraph aloud very slowly, then very quickly.
Explore with your senses	Seated, close your eyes and identify objects or foods by touch and smell.
Puzzle it out	Crosswords, word games, or a new card game.
Learn something new	A new song, a few words in a new language, a new recipe.
Cross-body moves	Seated or holding a counter, touch your right hand to your left knee, then switch. Repeat 10 times.

Safety first

Check with your doctor or physiotherapist before starting a new exercise program. Hold on to something stable for balance exercises, and stop if you feel dizzy or unwell.

Start here (pick one)

- Take a 10-minute walk every day this week.
- Do 5 sit-to-stands from a chair after breakfast.
- Choose one brain-retraining exercise and do it daily.
- Put on music and dance to one song.

Pillar 3: Calm

STRESS MANAGEMENT AND YOUR VAGUS NERVE

Calming your nervous system isn't a luxury. It's one of the most important ways to lower inflammation and protect your brain.

How stress affects the brain

Chronic stress floods the body with cortisol. Over time, this raises inflammation, weakens the barrier that protects the brain, disrupts sleep, and affects the hippocampus, the part of the brain involved in memory and the sleep-wake cycle. Living with a diagnosis is stressful, which makes daily calm even more important.

Hidden stressors to reduce

- **Blood sugar swings** from sugary or white-flour foods. See Pillar 1.
- **Chemicals in everyday products.** Choose cleaner body-care and cleaning products. The EWG Skin Deep database can help you check.
- **Over-scheduling.** Leave space in your day to rest.

Your calm toolkit

Breathe Slow belly breathing switches on rest and digest.	**Walk outside** Fresh air, daylight, and gentle movement together.	**Write it down** Journal or pray about what's on your mind, then set it aside.
Gratitude Note three things you're grateful for each day.	**Enjoy a hobby** Music, singing, art, gardening: anything that absorbs you. Music and art therapy are especially calming.	**Connect** Time with people who lift you up is good medicine.

Wake up your vagus nerve

The vagus nerve is the main line between your brain and gut. It switches on rest and digest, and helps control digestion, heart rate, and mood. In Parkinson's and MS, this connection can slow down, which is one reason constipation is so common. These simple exercises "wake up" the vagus nerve.

Exercise	How to do it	How often
Sing out loud	Choose a happy song you know and belt it out with gusto for 3–5 minutes. The car or shower is perfect.	Twice a day
Gargle	Gargle each sip of a glass of water, strongly and for longer than feels comfortable. Watery eyes are normal.	Twice a day
Belly breathing	Lie or sit comfortably with a hand on your belly. Breathe in through your nose so your belly rises, pause, and breathe out fully. Start with 10 breaths and build to 20.	Twice a day
Hum	Hum a tune or a long "mmm" sound for a minute and feel the vibration in your throat and chest. Or rest your tongue flat against the roof of your mouth and breathe slowly for a minute.	Any time

> **Rotate them.** Do a different exercise each day. The one that feels least familiar is often the one that helps most. If you have swallowing difficulties, ask your speech-language pathologist before gargling.

Start here (pick one)

- Do 2 minutes of belly breathing before breakfast and before bed.
- Sing one song out loud every day.
- Write down three things you're grateful for each evening.
- Look at your calendar and take one thing off this week.

Pillar 4: Rest

A WELL-RESTED BRAIN IS A HEALTHY BRAIN

Sleep is not your brain switching off. It's when your brain does some of its most important work.

What happens while you sleep

Brain clean-up During deep sleep, the brain's own cleaning system (the glymphatic system) flushes out waste built up during the day.	**Repair** Cells repair, inflammation settles, and the immune system recharges.
Memory The brain sorts and stores what you learned during the day.	**Balance** Sleep regulates appetite, mood, energy, and how well you cope with stress.

Your body runs on a 24-hour clock (your circadian rhythm). Light, meals, movement, and a regular schedule all help keep that clock on time.

Eight habits for better sleep

Habit	What to do
Keep a steady schedule	Go to bed and wake up at the same times every day, weekends included. Aim to be in bed by about 10 pm.
Get morning light	Spend 5–15 minutes outside soon after waking, before looking at your phone.

Move in the morning	A short morning walk helps set your body clock.
Stop caffeine by 2 pm	Caffeine can keep you awake many hours later.
Finish eating 3 hours before bed	And avoid sugary snacks in the evening.
Screens off 2 hours before bed	Blue light tells your brain it's daytime. Charge your phone outside the bedroom.
Wind down	A calm 30-minute routine: a warm bath, reading, prayer, journaling, or gratitude.
Dark, cool and quiet	Blackout curtains or an eye mask, and a cool room around 15–19°C (60–67°F).

When to talk to your doctor

Mention it if you act out your dreams, have restless or uncomfortable legs at night, wake often to use the bathroom, or feel very sleepy during the day. These are common with Parkinson's and MS and can often be helped. Your NeuroGems practitioner can also talk with you about gentle sleep supports such as magnesium or chamomile tea.

Start here (pick one)

- Set a regular bedtime and wake time, and keep them all week.
- Step outside for 10 minutes of morning light every day.
- Turn off screens 2 hours before bed.
- Write three things you're grateful for before sleep.

Part 4: Your 8-week plan

ONE FOCUS A WEEK

Each week adds one new focus. Keep the habits from earlier weeks going as you add new ones. If a week feels like too much, stay there longer. Progress, not perfection.

Week	Focus	This week's action
1	Find your why	Create your vision board or goal list and fill in your commitment page.
2	Nourish: clear out	Remove dairy and processed snacks from your kitchen and swap in nourishing basics.
3	Nourish: add in	Add a colourful vegetable to two meals a day and have fish twice.
4	Move	Walk or exercise for at least 10 minutes every day.
5	Brain retraining	Do one brain-retraining exercise each day.
6	Calm	Belly breathing twice a day, and one vagus nerve exercise daily.
7	Rest	Steady bedtime, morning light and screens off 2 hours before bed.
8	Bring it together	Use the daily tracker for all four pillars and celebrate your progress.

Habit stacking ideas

- After I wake up, I'll drink a glass of warm lemon water.
- After I brush my teeth, I'll sing one song out loud.
- Before each meal, I'll take five slow belly breaths.
- After dinner, I'll have a cup of herbal tea instead of dessert.
- Before bed, I'll write three things I'm grateful for.

My daily pillar tracker

Tick each pillar you looked after today. One tick is a win. Print a fresh page each week.

Week of: _____

Pillar	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
Nourish: colourful, dairy-free meals	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Water: 8 glasses	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Move: 10+ minutes	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Brain retraining exercise	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Calm: belly breathing	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Vagus nerve exercise	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Rest: on-time bedtime	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Morning light	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

This week's reflection

Keep: what helped?	Try: what will I add next week?	Ask: where do I need support?

My routines

Plan a simple morning and evening routine. Write the steps in order and keep the page somewhere you'll see it.

Morning routine	Evening wind-down
Example: warm lemon water · 10 minutes of morning light · stretch · nourishing breakfast	Example: herbal tea · screens off · warm bath or reading · gratitude list · lights out
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.

My book of evidence

What you focus on grows. Each day, write down one sign that your efforts are working: more energy, a better night's sleep, an easier walk, a good laugh.

Date	What I noticed

> **You're not doing this alone**
> Every small step you take for your brain and body counts. Keep what works, try what fits, and reach out to your NeuroGems team whenever you need support, encouragement, or help finding your next step.