

Katie Johnson: Good morning and welcome to Apple a Day, Lake Region Healthcare's Health and Wellness program, where we feature news and information you can use to live a healthier life. I am Katie Johnson, your host, and my guests today are Nancy Symens and Lorri Holt. They are here to tell us about Rock Steady Boxing, a new program for Parkinson's patients. Nancy is a physical therapist and certified coach of both Rock Steady Boxing and LSVT BIG certified instructor, and Lorri is another certified Rock Steady Boxing coach.

To introduce this topic, although there is no cure, we're learning more and more about what are effective techniques in combating the symptoms of Parkinson's, and Nancy, I'd like to start by just talking about Parkinson's disease in general. Give us some background. What are the symptoms? How is it diagnosed?

Nancy Symens: Good morning, Katie. Thank you. Parkinson's is a movement disorder that changes people's lives by affecting their entire world around them. The brain is unable to make enough of the communicating chemicals to the muscles of the body. It becomes harder to start to move and continue to move because muscles become rigid, and it becomes more difficult to get in and out of bed or a chair or your car, and walking becomes a challenge because of the shorter steps. The posture becomes kind of flexed forward, and it's hard to move. It's very fatiguing.

It's often hard to get a good night's sleep, too. Overall, movement is a tendency to be slower and smaller and it takes a lot more energy to move. Some people have tremors in a hand or foot, and balance can become a challenge, and then one's voice can tend to become soft and low, as well.

Katie Johnson: So that's the reason that the BIG and LOUD that we hear about focuses on both the movements and the speech, if I understand, right?

Nancy Symens: A lot of research has been done for the BIG and LOUD, and also exercise in general. The BIG program is designed to get back that movement, working the muscles in that BIG movement work people have forgotten. The muscles and the brain has forgotten how to move in more of a normal pattern, so that's what we work on.

Katie Johnson: We were talking before the show. Early intervention makes a big difference in how you can combat this disease, right?

Nancy Symens: It sure does. Yes. Studies have shown over and over that as soon as someone is diagnosed to get after it. Fight back through exercise, especially specialized exercise that's geared towards people with Parkinson's so the symptoms can be reduced, you can get your life back. It's just really important, and shown that it really does help.

Katie Johnson: Lorri, what's your connection to wanting to become a certified coach with Rock Steady Boxing and work with Parkinson's patients?

Lorri Holt: Well, Parkinson's came into my life about 10 years ago. My husband was diagnosed at that time with Parkinson's. So we learned a lot about Parkinson's really fast. And over the years, we both have just really tried to find things that would help him live a better life and to keep functioning and keep living. He's a farmer, so just keep living the life that he's always lived. It's been a lot of different exercises. He's gone through the BIG and LOUD program. He has gone to a chiropractor in town who also ... we call him her guinea pig ... and she does a lot of crazy stuff with him to try to combat the Parkinson's. And a lot of it has really helped. She's done a lot of eye movement therapy with him.

The Rock Steady Boxing was introduced to us up in Fargo. David and I are both part of Midwest Parkinson's Initiative, it's called MPI. It came about about four or five years ago and it's based in Fargo. Through them, one of the other people that are on the board was going to go to the Rock Steady Boxing training. So I became interested in it, too. And I said, "You know, I think I want to go. Maybe I could teach a few classes back in Fergus Falls. We could do it there, too."

Once we got there, holy smokes. It was totally different from what we thought. And it's a fabulous program and there's so much to the program. I did, I brought it back here to Fergus Falls, and I needed to find somebody that would do the program. I started talking to Natalie over at the Health and Wellness Hub, and it's taken us a long time to get the program going, but a year later, we're here.

Katie Johnson: That's awesome.

Lorri Holt: We're starting.

Katie Johnson: Yeah, that's so exciting. Tell me a little bit more about what was involved. There's a few people who have been trained. What was the training like? Where did you have to go? What kind of equipment? Like you said, there's a lot involved in getting it together.

Nancy Symens: We'll probably tag team on this, but there's four of us, three that work for Lake Region Healthcare and Lorri, and so the four of us went down to Indianapolis, Indiana.

Lorri Holt: Yep. Indianapolis, Indiana.

Nancy Symens: And it was a two and a half day course. Rock Steady Boxing is all about balance. The boxing part is the fighting back, but you're working with coordination and balance again, agility. The whole program works on flexibility, your range of motion, your strengthening, agility, coordination, balance, cognitive, your thinking, your learning. We're always changing things up. Keep things fresh and challenging for everybody, and anybody who has Parkinson's, any degree of disability or whatever, Rock Steady Boxing can be-

Lorri Holt: Beneficial to them.

Nancy Symens: ... tailored and individualized for them, but yet in a group setting.

Katie Johnson: I was going to ask, how is it different in helping Parkinson's patients from other forms of exercise?

Lorri Holt: They take the exercises and they really push them. They push the fighter. They push them to exercise just even a little bit harder, and by pushing above and beyond, it seems to help combat all of the symptoms so they're able to move better and they're tired, but it's a good tired. Like one of our boxers says, "I'm really tired, but it's a good tired."

Katie Johnson: You kind of touched on this. Can anyone with any severity level of Parkinson's join Rock Steady Boxing, or are there maybe certain criteria you need to meet to qualify?

Nancy Symens: Well, everybody goes through the assessment part. They have to be able to go through that and pass that in a sense, but pretty much anybody can. Even someone who's mostly in a wheelchair, then they can participate as well, if they go through the assessment and see where they're at. Each person is asked to bring a cornerman, which is someone who's very high level and doesn't have many symptoms that interfere with their ability to work out, and that their cornerman can actually participate in the program, as well, which is really cool.

And then as people who maybe might need a little assistance here and there, it's one of the requirements for Rock Steady is that there is a cornerman there, a dedicated person that comes with them each time. Helps them get to where they need to, and it's pretty fun. It's really exciting.

Katie Johnson: I bet that partnership is part of the power of the program.

Lorri Holt: It is, and also the camaraderie that we're seeing happening already with our participants. That's really important to them, and getting out, it's part of the socialization that a lot of them haven't had because of the disease. They stay at home and don't get out as much, but by going to this, they're all the same. They all have it, and they can talk about it and discuss what helps one and maybe this will help you out, and it's just we're seeing a lot of camaraderie going on.

Katie Johnson: It's part support group, part exercise class, it sounds like.

Lorri Holt: Absolutely [crosstalk 00:08:25].

Katie Johnson: Great. That's fantastic. Well, the classes have just started, from what I understand. Tell me a little bit about where they are, when they are. How can someone find out more about maybe checking out a class or joining a class?

Lorri Holt: Sure. The classes are located at the Mill Center, and they are Monday through Thursday. Mondays and Wednesdays, the class is at 1:00 and we ask our participants to be there ready to go at 1:00, and it goes until 2:30. And on Tuesdays and Thursdays, class is at 5:00 and it goes until 6:30.

We're trying to do it at different times of the day so that we can get people that are still working to be able to come and participate in the evening classes.

Katie Johnson: This isn't the only resource we have for Parkinson's patients or for other specialty populations. Maybe it's a good time to touch on some of the other resources we have available, too.

Nancy Symens: Yeah, great. That's great, Katie. Thank you. Other resources that are provided by Lake Region Healthcare is physical therapy, of course, and speech therapy. We offer the LSVT LOUD and BIG program, and that's in the clinical setting. And then there's the people who graduate from the LSVT BIG program. We offer weekly group class, and that meets on Thursdays from 1:00 to 2:00 every week. And then there's an awesome support group, Living Well with Parkinson's that is held monthly on the first Thursday of the month from 2:00 to 3:30. And that's held at the-

Lorri Holt: Over at Mill Street.

Nancy Symens: Yeah, thank you.

Lorri Holt: And Mick Sims runs that class.

Katie Johnson: Great.

Lorri Holt: And he's also one of our boxing coaches.

Katie Johnson: Yeah, we should mention who the other coaches are.

Lorri Holt: It's Mick Simms and then Chris Jon Veum who is an RN over at Mill Street, too.

Katie Johnson: Anything else that you want our listeners to know about Rock Steady Boxing, in particular, or how they can take the next step to find out more if they think it's something that could help them or someone that they love?

Nancy Symens: The best thing to do would be to contact your healthcare provider and ask for a referral [inaudible 00:10:28] the Lifestyle Medicine program here at Lake Region. And then from there, that'll shift over to the Wellness Center and they'll give you a call and you'll go through an assessment and get you plugged in.

Lorri Holt: Another exciting thing that's happening, Katie, is that we're going to have a big open house coming up.

Katie Johnson: Oh, great.

Lorri Holt: And that is going to be on April 26th, which is a Thursday, and we're having it at two different times that day. We're having it from 11:00 to 1:00 and also from 5:00 to 7:00 that night. We're going to have some smaller classes going on during that time so that people can come and see what Rock Steady Boxing is all about and how a class works, but also we want people to come and just look at the gym and look at our equipment. Ask us questions. Find out how they can come and start participating with us.

Katie Johnson: Great.

Nancy Symens: We're going to have some handouts, information, too, for people. Just definitely talk to us. Talk to our boxers. There's going to be some drawings, some prizes. So you got to get in on that.

Katie Johnson: Yeah, great. Well, thank you both so much for what you have done to bring Rock Steady Boxing to Fergus Falls, to Lake Region Healthcare and the Health and Wellness Hub, and for sharing with our listeners what this means, what the opportunity is, and inviting everyone else out to check it out, as well. I appreciate everything that you've done and for joining me on the show today.

Rock Steady Boxing can be checked out any Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday at their regular class times or, of course, in the open house April 26th, from 11:00 to 1:00 or 5:00 to 7:00 at Lake Region Healthcare's Health and Wellness Hub, right here on the Lake Region Healthcare campus, just across Cascade Street from the hospital, and we hope to see many of you there.

My guests today, Nancy Symens and Lorri Holt, with the Rock Steady Boxing program for Parkinson's at Lake Region Healthcare. Lorri, Nancy, and Katie remind you there is so much to do here. Stay healthy for it. Have a great day.