

## WALKING, FREEZING AND FALLING

The underlying cause of Parkinson's symptoms relates to a decline in the production of a brain chemical called dopamine. Many cells that produce dopamine are in the Basal Ganglia, a group of structures in the middle of the brain best known for their role in movement.

This lack of dopamine means people can have difficulty controlling their movements and moving freely. Movement slows, muscles stiffen and posture changes. This can lead to challenges with walking, falling and freezing.

### WALKING (GAIT)

Gait is used to describe how a person walks. Gait is often impaired in people living with Parkinson's. The most common changes include:

- slowed movement
- small steps/shuffling
- little or no swing of one or both arms
- tendency to lean forward.

It's also common for people living with Parkinson's to become easily tired during walking, even after short distances. This is likely to become more prominent as Parkinson's progresses.

Changes to walking can be related to the medication cycle, eg, as a result of the 'on/off' cycles of Parkinson's medications.

## TIPS FOR WALKING SAFELY

- always take medications on time
- undertake regular exercise to help with balance and leg strength
- wear supportive footwear
- walk to a rhythm (listening to a beat or music can help)
- focus on taking long strides
- use walking aids if prescribed.

**FREECALL INFORMATION LINE**

**1800 644 189**

## FALLING

Gait impairment can make people living with Parkinson's more likely to fall. Other causes of falls include reduced blood pressure and environmental hazards, both outside and in the home.

Falls can occur at any stage of Parkinson's, but are more likely to happen and cause serious injury in the later stages of Parkinson's.

Falling is particularly hazardous because of the risk of serious injury and are a common cause of hospital admission for people living with Parkinson's.

If you've had a fall recently, advise your GP and neurologist, particularly if falls are becoming more frequent. Adjusting medications can prove helpful in some situations.



## TIPS TO REDUCE THE RISK OF FALLS AT HOME

- remove hazards in your home, such as rugs and furniture that obstruct walkways
- ensure you have good overhead lighting, particularly at steps
- install handrails at steps and grab rails in bathrooms
- apply strips of tape to the floor in areas where freezing of gait occurs
- purchase a pendant alarm system to alert others if a fall occurs.

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## FREEZING

Freezing is when a person stops suddenly while trying to move and the movement becomes frozen. Freezing normally occurs in specific situations, such as when:

- starting to walk
- stepping through a doorway
- attempting to turn a corner; or
- approaching a chair.

People living with Parkinson's may also experience episodes of freezing during other repetitive activities such as brushing their teeth or writing. Freezing can also occur to speech.

Freezing is normally only temporary, but can be hazardous due to the increased possibility of falling when freezing while walking.

Freezing is one of the movement symptoms that cannot be explained by slowed movement or stiff muscles. While the cause of freezing is unknown, it can be linked to the medication cycle, occurring more commonly during 'off' periods.

## TIPS TO AVOID FREEZING EPISODES

- prompt yourself by saying aloud 'left, right, left, right' OR 'one, two, one, two' OR 'one, two, three, step'
- stand still and start swinging your arms
- start shifting your weight from foot to foot
- visualise an imaginary line to step over.

## TIPS TO OVERCOME FREEZING EPISODES

- always take your medications on time
- walk to a rhythm (listening to a beat or music can help)
- avoid distractions when walking so you can focus on long steps.

## SUPPORT FOR YOU

If you are experiencing any of the detailed symptoms, you should work with your GP to put together a team of health specialists to support you, including:

- an occupational therapist and physiotherapist to teach you strategies to help overcome episodes of freezing and preventing falls, including a home assessment.
- A physiotherapist to undertake a personalised assessment and develop a treatment program to help with problems related to walking.

Ask your GP to develop a chronic disease management plan, which will allow you a limited number of Medicare rebated visits to allied healthcare professionals.



**Information provided by Parkinson's Victoria,  
providing help for today and hope for tomorrow.**

## CONTACT US

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