

GAIT, BALANCE AND FREEZING WORKSHEET

Many of the main motor symptoms of Parkinson's—tremor, rigidity, stiffness and postural instability—can cause difficulties with walking and balance. Freezing, problems initiating movements that often results in feeling like your feet are glued to the floor, is especially common in the later stages of Parkinson's. This worksheet provides ideas to help improve gait and balance and to manage freezing. Check the options you can begin to implement right now and be sure to discuss any continuing challenges with your doctor and wellness team.

Physical Exercise and Training

- Perform balance exercises every day, even before you think you need them. Consider it part of your routine, like brushing your teeth. Balance is critical for walking. You can always improve your balance, even if it seems perfect right now! For more specific balance exercises, see the “Balancing Life, Exercise and Function for Optimal Health” article in the “Complementary Therapies” chapter of the **Living Well Now** section.
- Exercise daily. Include stretching, strengthening and exercises to help you get out of a chair, stand straighter and walk farther.
- See a physical therapist who specializes in movement disorders to develop a home exercise program, even if you have one. Ask your PT when you should be re-evaluated. Do not wait for your doctor to initiate it – you can ask for it. See the “Why Exercise Matters” chapter in the **Living Well Now** section for more details about at-home exercises to improve gait, balance and freezing.
- Practice making wide U-turns rather than pivot turns to avoid falling.
- Use a walking aid if you need help walking. It will help you walk better, keep you safe and remain independent longer. Be sure you see your physical therapist to choose the correct cane or walker. Using the wrong one can actually cause falls!

Lifestyle and Good Habits

- Get in the habit of daily exercise. Five minutes of exercise daily is better than 20 minutes once a week.
- Establish a routine. Write your goals and expectations on a calendar.
- Try to time your exercise to the time of day you feel best, such as when your medications are working.

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- Exercise with a buddy. Everyone in your family can benefit. Consider a “balance night” devoted to balance games. You do not need fancy video games for this. Make up your own challenges. Keep safety first, though. It is a good idea to involve your physical therapist before beginning.
 - Avoid multitasking. Do one thing at a time. Avoid carrying multiple objects in both hands if you have trouble walking. This helps you focus on the task of walking if you have trouble.

Dietary Changes

- Dizziness and low blood pressure can cause weakness, fatigue, loss of consciousness and falls. See the “Low Blood Pressure and Dizziness Worksheet” as well as the and “Nutrition Self-Assessment” for additional treatment recommendations.
- Eat the high-energy foods explained in the “Diet and Nutrition” chapter in the **Living Well Now** section, rather than processed, high-sugar foods that rob you of your energy.

Treatment

- There is a tendency to blame difficulties solely on Parkinson’s, but there are many causes of walking and balance problems. Fatigue, heart and lung conditions, muscle weakness, stroke, inner-ear problems, peripheral neuropathy, joint pain and arthritis are all examples of conditions that occur more often as we age. Talk with your doctor to be sure that these potential other problems are treated.

Tips for Freezing

Freezing (feet stuck to the floor) occurs in crowded, small places. Often, the act of initiating movement, such as when you stand and begin walking, make a turn or with any stop and start of movement, prompts freezing.

- Learn to make wide “U-turns.” Avoid pivoting. If you use a walker, be sure your walker is the right type for freezing.
- See your physical therapist to review cueing strategies. Cueing from lasers, guided imagery, marching or even walking to the beat of a musical rhythm can help get you over or through a freezing spell. For instance, sing the first few lines of a common song like “Happy Birthday” in your head to help get “unstuck.”
- See your occupational therapist to review areas that cause you to freeze. Can crowded spaces be identified, such as bathrooms or closets? Can these areas be modified by removing clutter?

EVERY VICTORY COUNTS

- ▶ Experiment with flooring and shoes. Shoes with soft rubber soles are comfortable, but may “stick” to the floor. Different flooring textures, color changes and patterns can precipitate freezing, such as changing from tile to carpet.
- Experiment with putting tape on the floor, a step distance apart. This can serve as a visual cue to help you lift your legs to walk over and through a tight space or threshold.