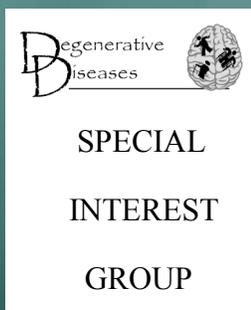


FACT SHEET



Parkinson's Disease and Walking

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How Does Parkinson's Disease Affect Walking?

Walking can be hard for people with Parkinson's Disease (PD). This is because the disease causes damage to an area of the brain that controls movements. As the disease worsens all movements will tend to become slower and smaller, including walking. Over time, people with PD may walk slowly with their chest bent forward, with short fast "shuffling" steps, and with less arm and body movement which gives them a stiff appearance. Sometimes people with PD have "freezing" episodes which means that the person gets "stuck" and is unable to take a step or continue walking. This is usually caused by a change in the surface the person is walking on (i.e. going from tile to carpet), when passing through a doorway, or when making turns.

What can Physical Therapists (PTs) do to help people with PD to walk better?

A physical therapist (PT) will observe how a person with PD is walking, and will suggest different exercises to help improve any problems. These might include:

- exercises to stretch tight muscles, such as ankle muscles,
- exercises to strengthen body and leg muscles,
- exercises to improve balance during standing still, walking, and turning.

PTs can teach people with PD different ways to help them to walk better such as teaching the person to think and picture that they are walking with BIG steps both before and while they are walking. Or, they may suggest cues such as the beat of music, saying "right-left," or putting lines on the floor to help people take bigger steps and walk faster than they normally do. They can teach how to turn safely and how to prevent or get out of a "freezing" episode if it happens. The PT can also advise a person with PD what to do if they are having difficulty walking while doing something else such as carrying a bag.



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