

# Posture and Parkinson's Disease

## FACT SHEET



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Parkinson's disease (PD) causes tremors (shaking of hands and/or legs), slow movements, and muscle stiffness. Over time this stiffness can cause muscles to become tighter, and the posture to become slouched so that the head and chest are bent forward. This slouched posture can upset the person's balance and make it easier to fall. It can make activities like walking and eating more difficult, and can cause back, neck, and shoulder pain. Medications may improve the muscle stiffness, but they do not directly improve flexibility or posture.

### *How can Physical Therapy (PT) Help?*

Physical therapists (PTs) can help people with PD to have better posture and decreased muscle stiffness at all stages of the disease. They may teach:

- stretching and range of motion exercises such as lying down flat or rotating the legs to the left and right. This can loosen tight muscles that cause poor posture,
- yoga and Tai Chi exercises to relax muscles and make movements easier,
- strengthening exercises especially of muscles that straighten the back and legs,
- practice of everyday activities like rolling in bed, standing up from a chair, or reaching overhead,
- balance exercises such as stepping and walking in many directions to help with balance,
- cues such as using a mirror or wall to help correct a leaning posture,
- ways to help a person start or stop a movement when walking or during turns.

It is best to start these exercises as early as possible after getting a diagnosis of PD. If done the right way, a good stretching program can improve the posture and mobility of someone with Parkinson's Disease. Consult a physical therapist to talk about these exercises.



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