

# Parkinson Disease and Walking

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## Fact Sheet

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## How does Parkinson Disease affect walking?

Walking can be hard for people with Parkinson Disease (PD). This is because the disease impacts areas of the brain that control movements. As the disease progresses all movements will tend to become slower and smaller, including walking. Over time, people with PD may walk slowly with their trunk bent forward, with short “shuffling” steps, and with less arm and body movement, which gives them a stiff appearance.

## What is freezing?

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 triggered 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 PT will observe how a person with PD is walking and will suggest specific exercises to help improve any problems. Dosing and strategies should be individualized, and not every person responds to every strategy. It is important to work with a PT to find the best combination of exercises to help improve walking. These may include:

- Strategies for walking with bigger steps
- Training the use of tools like walking poles, laser light, or metronome
- Exercises to strengthen body and leg muscles
- Exercises to improve balance during standing, walking, and turning
- Exercises to improve endurance and aerobic fitness
- Exercises to improve posture

## What can PTs do to help people with PD when freezing?

- Use visual cues like a line or laser on the floor to step over
- Use auditory cues like music, metronome, saying “right-left”, counting, or singing
- 4 Ss to get out of a freeze—stop, stand tall, sway, step big
- Practice common triggers like turning to have task-specific strategies
- Try out different assistive devices
- Manual assistance is not recommended, except to prevent a fall related to freezing

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