

WALKING

With Parkinson's disease (PD), walking can become an effort. In fact, you may have noticed one foot dragging when you walk as one of your first symptoms of the disease.

PD can cause your muscles to cramp if you get overtired or if you not receiving adequate medication. As the disease progresses, you may have problems with balance and posture which, in turn, can affect your centre of gravity. You might walk with a shuffle or, alternatively, you may find that you begin walking normally but progress to shorter faster steps until you are almost running on the balls of your feet. Any problem with walking has the potential for causing a fall. Here are a few suggestions for improving your walking capabilities and your safety:

- Know your limits but try to walk every day. Start with a 10-minute walk, gradually building to 30 minutes.
- Walk when you feel rested and when your drugs are most effective.
- Concentrate on a good stride and arm swing. This may require you to walk with no conversation to interrupt you.
- To maintain balance, stand as straight as you can and walk with your feet a little wider apart than normal.
- Wear comfortable shoes with good arch supports. If you shuffle, avoid shoes with rubber or crepe soles.
- Pay careful attention to changes in ground surfaces (e.g. curb to pavement or carpet to bare floor).
- Turn with small steps rather than pivoting on one foot.
- If you have significant difficulty with walking, use a wheelchair for longer excursions (e.g. shopping malls, garden centres, airports, etc.). By helping you to conserve precious energy, a wheelchair can actually give you more freedom.

Source: Pacific Parkinson's Research Centre, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC

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