

MANAGING BALANCE AND FALL RISKS IN PARKINSON'S

Parkinson's disease (PD) affects the parts of the brain controlling balance and coordination. As a result, balance and coordination adjustments that were once automatic now require conscious effort. Additionally, some drugs used to treat PD can lower blood pressure, causing a feeling of faintness when getting up from a sitting or lying position (called Orthostatic Hypotension). Difficulty with balance and/or low blood pressure can increase the risk of falling and bone fractures, both of which can be serious.

Here are a few suggestions for managing balance problems:

- Have your blood pressure checked to ensure that it is not too low.
- Remove throw rugs and low-lying obstacles from pathways inside and outside your home.
- Avoid using stepladders and stools.
- Use a cane with a large base or a walker with brakes. Get professional advice before you make a major purchase.
- When walking, 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).
- Consult a physiotherapist, who can assess your overall safety and mobility, and teach you and your partner what to do in case of a fall.

Balance Checklist

Balance and good posture can work together to improve your activities of daily living. When your body is correctly aligned, movement is more efficient and stable. To establish good posture:

1. Stand with your back against a wall, your feet flat on the floor, and your heels approximately 3-4 inches or less from the wall.
2. Hold your head erect, chin parallel to the floor, and your vision focused on a target at eye level.
3. Relax the arms and shoulders.
4. The buttocks, shoulder blades, and, if possible, the back of the head should be touching the wall. Focus on keeping chin parallel with the floor and eyes on a target.
5. Evenly distribute weight throughout feet, front to back, and side to side.
6. Pull your abdominals in, and lift your chest.
7. Hold position for 15 to 30 seconds, and then relax.
8. Repeat the above directions 2-3 more times.

Additional Resources

In-Home Safety Check Helpsheet | bit.ly/pdhomesafetycheck

Stay on Your Feet Booklet | bit.ly/pdstayonyourfeet