

FREEZING

People with Parkinson's disease (PD) can sometimes experience "frozen gait," commonly known as "freezing." This is an inability to move your feet and it has been described as feeling like your feet are glued or magnetized to the ground. Freezing can last a few seconds to a few minutes, and is most common when negotiating narrow spaces, such as a doorway, or beginning a voluntary movement, such as getting out of a chair or walking. Speech can also freeze and you might not be able to begin a sentence or you might suddenly stop in the middle of one.

Freezing usually develops when balance is also impaired. This combination can be dangerous and lead to falls because the beginning and ending of freezing episodes can be unpredictable and anxiety-provoking. Treatment by a physiotherapist can be very helpful for dealing with freezing and other balance-related problems.

Coping with Freezing

Be sure to tell your doctor that you are experiencing freezing. Some medication adjustments may be helpful. Note that **freezing should not be confused with motor fluctuations**, known as "off" periods. These fluctuations should also be discussed with your doctor. If you regularly experience freezing episodes, avoid walking any distance alone.

Don't fight freezing by trying harder to step forward. Instead, take a deep breath, focus on your balance, and try some of the strategies below to get you going. Choose the strategies that feel the safest and easiest for you:

- Try visual or sensory cues to get you going, such as:
 - Have a companion turn sideways and put one foot in front of yours. On a count of three, step over it, and continue counting and walking until your stride is normal.
 - Ask your companion to stand in front of you, with their back toward you. Place your right hand on their left shoulder, and on a count of three, step forward.
 - Carry a cane. If you freeze while walking, turn your cane upside down, and use the handle on the ground as a cue to step over and get you going again. Step slowly and carefully.
 - Carry a laser pointer. When you freeze, shine the laser in front of your foot, and step on the light. Laser pointers are readily available in retailers such as Walmart or Canadian Tire.
 - Visualize an object on the ground in front of you, and try to step over it.
- Try using music and other auditory cues:
 - Carry a small metronome in your pocket. The beat can help you re-start. Metronome sounds can be downloaded as a phone application.
 - Try humming a song, and time your re-start with the beat of the music.
 - Count to 3 out loud, then step forward.
 - Listen to rhythmical music, and step with the rhythm.
- Try another movement:
 - Raise an arm, touch your head, point to the ceiling, and then re-start.
 - Change direction. If you can't move forward, try stepping sideways, and then moving forward.
 - Shift your weight from side to side to help initiate taking a step.
 - March in place a few times, and then step forward.
 - Shift your attention from moving the legs to moving the arms, then resume walking.

Additional Resources

Balance and Falling Helpsheet | Parkinson Society BC | bit.ly/pdbalanceandfalling

Stay on Your Feet Booklet | Parkinson Society BC | bit.ly/pdstayonyourfeet

Sources

Ashlkog, J.E. (2005). *The Parkinson's disease treatment book: Partnering with your doctor to get the most from your medications*. New York: Oxford University Press.

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