Walking with Parkinson’s Disease

Problems with walking are common for people with Parkinson’s disease (PD). They can lead to a higher risk of falls and loss of independence. When walking, people with PD tend to:

- Take very small steps
- Have decreased arm swing
- Walk at a slower speed
- Freeze up when walking stops and then have trouble starting again

Your physical therapist can identify problems with your walking and help you learn to walk better and safer.

Here are some things that may help you with your walking.

Start a walking program

Walk for 20 to 30 minutes, three days a week. You can walk outside or on a treadmill. Be sure you talk to your doctor or physical therapist before starting any new exercises program, such as a walking program. You need to be sure you are healthy and safe enough to do the exercise.

Walk BIG

When you walk, focus on BIG steps and BIG arm swings. If it does not feel like it is too big, it is not BIG enough!

Focus on Walking

- Walking is not automatic for people with PD. You need to think about the movement of your arms and legs while you walk.
- Limit talking if you are walking with others. Instead, focus on re-teaching your body how to move more normally. Ask for feedback on how your walking looks after you are done.

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Learn more about your health care.
**Listen to music**
Studies have shown that listening to music with a steady beat may help persons with PD walk at a more regular pace.

**Time your medicine**
- Take your medicine so you have **on time** and have the best effects when walking.
- Most patients take their medicine about an hour before activity, but the **on** and **off** time can be different for each person. Walking or other physical activity may change how fast the medicines are used in the body.
- Always carry extra pills with you in case you begin to have an **off time** while walking and you need to take another pill.
- Talk with your doctor for more information about the timing of your medicines and exercise.

**Try Nordic walking**
Nordic walking is walking with poles similar to ski poles. Research shows that Nordic walking can improve the step length, arm swing, and walking speed in patients with PD. Be sure to talk to your doctor or physical therapist before starting Nordic walking to be sure you are safe and healthy enough to do it.

When Nordic walking, you should walk in an upright position and make sure you do not lean forward or backward. Your head should be up and looking forward. The poles are held close to your body.

When the leading foot moves forward, the opposite arm swings forward to waist height. The opposite pole strikes the ground level with the heel of the leading foot. Be careful not to plant the pole in front of your feet. The poles should remain pointing diagonally backward and the pole should be pushed as far back as possible. The arm should straighten and the hand should be opening off the grip by the end of the arm swing.

For more information read the handout “Physical Therapy and Occupational Therapy for Parkinson’s Disease”.

Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.