

information

FALLS AND PARKINSON'S

Parkinson's is a progressive neurological condition, which is characterised by both motor (movement) and non-motor symptoms.

Falling and loss of balance are common problems for people living with Parkinson's. These problems develop over time as the condition progresses. For some people falling may be a daily occurrence and may even occur several times in one day.

Falling places people living with Parkinson's at significant risk of physical injury and hospitalisation. Learning to identify fall hazards will help reduce the risk of falling.

Possible Causes of Falls

There are numerous factors which increase the risk of falling in Parkinson's. Many of these are associated with impaired movement. These include stiff and rigid muscles, dystonia, postural instability and stooped posture, slowed movement, freezing, a shuffling gait and muscle fatigue. Other non-motor factors include impaired vision, sleep disturbance and urinary urgency.

Medications taken to manage Parkinson's and other conditions may increase the risk of falling. Parkinson's medications often result in dysknetic movements which can cause falls. In addition they may cause orthostatic hypotension which results in light-headedness and dizziness when changing positions, such as rising from sitting position. Confusion and drowsiness can result from medications and will increase the risk of falling.

Prevention of Falls

A discussion with the GP or treating medical specialist will identify any medical causes of falling. Referral to a physiotherapist and/or an occupational therapist can address the physical and environmental causes of falling. These health professionals can assist with teaching the safest and easiest way to get up following a fall.

Improving Home Safety

- Home assessment by an occupational therapist
- Reduce clutter to eliminate trip hazards
- Create unobstructed walkways throughout the home
- Ensure good overhead lighting, particularly at steps
- Consider installing handrails at steps and grab rails in bathrooms (minor home modifications)
- Apply strips of tape to floor in areas where freezing of gait occurs
- Consider purchasing a pendant alarm system in order to alert others if a fall occurs.

Improving Walking Safety

- Mobility assessment by a physiotherapist
- Use music or a metronome to walk to a beat
- Focus on taking long strides and swinging arms
- Focus attention when turning and do so slowly
- Maintain a regular exercise program to improve muscle strength and balance
- Wear supportive footwear
- Use walking aids if prescribed.

For further information contact
your state Parkinson's organisation:
Freecall 1800 644 189 www.parkinsons.org.au

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Improving Visual Problems

- Maintain regular eye checks
- Take care when wearing multifocal glasses, especially on stairs.

Medication Management

- Always take medications on time as prescribed by the treating specialist
- Ensure the GP and treating specialist are aware of all medications taken (prescription and non-prescription). Some medications can interact and contribute to falling.

What to do if a Fall Occurs

- Do not attempt to move quickly
- If injured (or there is a fear of injury) try to be as comfortable as possible
- Call for help using alarm system
- Carers and family members should avoid lifting someone who has fallen. This can result in risk of injury to the carer. Assist the person to help themselves – for example, bringing a chair to them so they have a means to lift themselves.

The fear of falling and associated loss of confidence may be as disabling as the actual falling. Avoiding falls is essential because of the risk of serious injuries. Being aware of the causes of falls may reduce the risk of falling.

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