



# Freezing



As Parkinson's disease (PD) progresses, people with PD may experience freezing of gait or "freezing" episodes. Freezing of gait is the temporary, involuntary inability to move. Not all people with PD experience freezing episodes, but those who do have a greater risk of falling. Usually, freezing only lasts a few seconds, but it is one of the more frustrating and dangerous symptoms of PD.

You may not always be able to prevent a freezing episode, but you can recognize when this Parkinson's symptom may happen and what you can do to minimize injury.

# What is freezing?

Freezing of gait is the temporary, involuntary inability to move.

- During a freezing episode, a person with PD may feel like their feet are stuck in place, or glue to the ground.
- Freezing may also affect other parts of the body or speech.
- Some people are more likely to have freezing episodes than others.
- Freezing may occur when the person with PD is due for the next dose of dopaminergic medications. This is called "off" freezing — usually, freezing episodes lessen after taking the medicine.
- The exact cause of freezing is unknown.

## What can trigger a freezing episode?

Freezing can occur at any time, but freezing episodes tend to happen more often when a person with Parkinson's is in transition. Freezing most often occurs when:

- Transitioning from standing to walking
- Walking through a doorway
- Turning a corner
- Turning around
- Stepping from one type of surface to another.
- Experiencing a stressful situation or attempting multitasking.

## Freezing and Falls

About 38 percent of people living with Parkinson's fall each year. PD-related falls occur mostly

<https://www.parkinson.org/living-with-parkinsons/management/activities-daily-living/freezing#:~:text=Freezing and Falls,much higher risk of falling.>

when turning or changing directions and are often related to a freezing episode.

- Not everyone living with PD will experience freezing episodes, but those who do are at a much higher risk of falling.
- Freezing creates a danger of falling because the beginning and end of a freezing episode are unpredictable.
- The unpredictability of freezing, along with efforts by well-meaning companions to force the person with PD to move, may cause loss of balance and falls.

## Managing Freezing Episodes

Talk to your doctor if you experience frequent freezing episodes. Adjusting your PD treatment may be helpful.

You may also ask about seeing a physical and/or occupational therapist. Physical therapists and occupational therapists trained in Parkinson's disease can teach you techniques that reduce your risk of falling.

## Overcoming a Freezing Episode

### Techniques

- **March or goose step** (swing your leg high and parallel to the ground with knees locked).
- **Shift the weight of your body** from one leg to another. Then exaggerate a large shift to one side while you step with the other foot.
- **Turn on music and step in time** with the rhythm. If you freeze frequently, walking with a smartphone in your pocket can be helpful. If you can't turn on music while you are frozen, try humming, singing or counting.
- **Imagine a line to step over** or focus on a target on the floor to step on. Consider using a mobile laser device to create a line in front of you to step over.

- **Turn by walking half a circle** or square instead of by a pivot turn.
- **Try the 4 S strategy: STOP, SIGH, SHIFT, STEP.** When you feel an episode of freezing starting try to **STOP** your movements, **SIGH** and take an audible breath, **SHIFT** your weight back and forth, and finally take an exaggerated first **STEP** to resume walking.

# How can a friend or family member help?

## Best Practices

- Remain calm. Wait patiently for several seconds to see if the episode passes.
- Do **not** rush or push the individual during a freezing episode.
- If the person is unable to move without assistance, try placing your foot perpendicular to the person and ask them to step over it.
- Encourage your loved one to breathe and try marching or counting, or to try some of the other tips mentioned above.
- If your loved one stays frozen, try to help rock them gently from side to side.

*Page reviewed by Dr. Bhavana Patel, Movement Disorders Neurologist at the University of Florida, a Parkinson's Foundation Center of Excellence.*

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[contact@parkinson.org](mailto:contact@parkinson.org)