

# Freezing & PD

Tips and tricks for managing



**When you start having trouble walking it can be painful (physically and emotionally) but more than that, it can be extremely frustrating.** Your body isn't cooperating and you can't force it. We know how hard it can be when you want to move, but you can't. It can be embarrassing and it can feel demeaning to make the hard decision to use a mobility aid. It's important to remember to do what is best for yourself and that includes your mental health. If using a walker is something you are considering because you know it would be helpful but it is too hard for your pride – it may not be that helpful in the end. Do what is best for you.

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"Freezing" is a term used the often misunderstood and frustrating phenomenon in which people have trouble starting a movement or are suddenly, and for a short time, unable to continue walking. Though they want to move, they feel as though they are "glued" in place for several seconds, or more rarely up to a minute. Some people experience a trembling in their legs or have small, frequent shuffling steps before they "freeze".

Freezing when walking is usually experienced by people who have had Parkinson disease for a number of years, though not everyone who has PD will develop freezing. It is often seen with other changes in walking, such as slow, shuffling steps with the feet close together. Freezing can occur with other types of movements such as writing, raising a cup to drink or brushing teeth, though it is less common.

## What causes freezing?

We don't yet understand why people with PD sometimes freeze. Freezing is unpredictable and frustrating. It can lead to potentially dangerous situations including falling, and can be made worse if you are anxious or stressed.

Freezing can happen when you feel your medications are working well or when they are not working well. Very rarely, an increase in medications can make freezing better, but more often it doesn't help at all.

*Think about taking BIG steps, counting aloud, or trying to step over something to get your feet moving*

## What can I do when I am frozen/stuck?

A number of strategies may help you get “unstuck” if you freeze. One or more of these tricks may work for you. A frustrating part of freezing is that what helps you move one time may not help you the next time. It is good to know a number of options, so if one doesn't work, you can try another. In general try to keep good posture and keep your eyes focused on where you want to go to avoid falling.

First, STOP trying to walk. Take a deep breath and look where you want to go. Think about how you want to move.

- Think about taking big, long steps. Imagine doing the action in your mind, then try to start moving
- Say “left, right, left, right” as you move your feet
- Try shifting your weight from side to side

## How to help someone who is stuck

If you are around someone with PD when they freeze it is tempting to want to pull their arm to help get them moving – this is not a good idea. This may push them off balance and worsen the problem. Here are some things you can do instead to try to help:

- Place your foot in front of their “frozen” foot and have them try to step over your foot
- Walk arm-in-arm with them (this may help avoid freezing as you will develop a rhythm walking together)
- Gently touch their elbow or shoulder, without pushing or pulling
- You can count, sing, or say “left, right, left, right” aloud and try to get them to walk to the beat