

Getting You Started on a Walking Program

1. Walking is a great form of exercise for persons with PD. It has a positive effect on balance, strength, mobility, range of motion of your joints, quality of life, aerobic capacity or how well your heart and lungs work, on mood and cognition or thinking skills, and even your PD severity score.
2. In order to have these effects, research states that it must be at a moderate level. For walking that means walking at a sustained brisk level. The recommendation from the Neurology Association for persons with PD is shoot for 150 total minutes per week of moderate level exercise. Please know that fluctuations in exercise consistency are the norm for people with PD. There are lots of things that can cause you not to exercise one or more weeks—injury, getting sick, multiple medical appointments, etc. If you fall off the “bandwagon” what is important is that you get back on the bandwagon
3. How can a person with PD get motivated to start a walking program? The key is to have goals that are **SMART**.
 - a. **Specific.** When and where will you walk? How often will you walk?
 - b. **Measurable.** Track your progress by time walking, distance walked, a decrease in your heart rate or blood pressure.
 - c. **Attainable.** You don’t have to go fast; you just have to go.
 - d. **Relevant.** Focus on the most pressing needs of the day—like getting up and moving or not missing a doctor appointment—above less necessary tasks.
 - e. **Timely.** Set up a schedule with reminders. Schedule it like you schedule your medications.
4. Ways to improve your walking:

Shoe Choice: If you are having problems clearing your foot when you step forward, try modifying your footwear to reduce friction between the sole of the shoe and the ground. This could help to decrease the frequency of catching your foot. So, maybe sneakers with good grippy soles are not the best shoes for someone to wear if they have a tendency to catch their feet. Maybe a standard sneaker shoe with a smooth sole would be better.

Rhythmic Auditory Stimulation: RAS is one of the most effective means to improve the speed of your walking

- What we are talking about is using rhythmical sounds to help improve motor movement. Walking is by its nature a rhythmical activity—1, 2,1,2
- Why do you need to do this? Your brain is responsible for the internal cueing of automatic rhythmical walking. Walking should be automatic and rhythmical -- 1,2,1,2 -- not requiring thinking about what you are doing. Your internal cueing mechanism doesn't work. So, if your internal cueing mechanism doesn't work than you have to rely on external cueing and that is rhythmical sounds.
- Examples for improving longer walks:
 1. Metronome: They can be purchased at any music store. They cost about \$5 at World of Music on West 26th Street. Walk and set the tempo at your normal walking pace. Once you have your walking pace, calculate 10% of that and increase the tempo by at least that amount. Some studies and our wellness program had the individuals increase by 20%
 2. Walking to music that matches your walking pace initially and then gradually increasing the beat of that music you play. Use your cell phone.

Posture and Gait

- Shuffling is connected with posture. Walking should be an upright erect activity. If posture is an issue that you think contributes to your shuffling, try standing tall when you walk. Pick out an object that is above your eye level and concentrate on that object as you walk.
- For some people your posture is what it is and strengthening your back muscles isn't going to have any significant effect on your posture. You may want to consider the use of a walker (external support) to reduce the severity of forward bent posture or back strain. The walker isn't meant to correct your posture but rather to maintain your posture. It needs to be set higher than for everyone else so it "pushes you up" to stand taller.

Starting to Walk after Standing Up-Start Hesitation

- Some people have difficulty initiating walking after they stand up. To address this, you can try a couple of interventions;
 - Relax and take 2-3 breaths after standing because it's no big deal that you go stuck. Say out loud or in your head 1,2,3 and on 3 try taking that 1st step
 - Put a small stick, a tissue, a small stone on the ground so you have an external visual cue. Again, say out loud or in your head 1,2,3 and on 3 try taking that 1st step over that object
 - Shift your weight laterally to the side and then take a step with the other leg

6. Turning While Walking

- Avoid pivoting 180 degrees. Make a wider turn if practical.
- Why this works—it doesn't change the motor task. If you turn 180 degrees your mind says "Gee whiz, I am going from walking to a turning task" and persons with PD have difficulty automatically making that change in the tasks. A wide turn just tells your brain that "I am still walking here, the task isn't changing, and I can handle this".

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