

What is balance, and how is it impacted by Parkinson Disease?

Parkinson disease leads to changes in your balance reactions. The reflexes that help you respond quickly when your balance is disturbed are slower or may not be working.

Balance problems can make you unsteady when standing, getting in and out of chairs, and while walking.

Also, changes in your strength can make reactions to disruption in your balance less effective.

Changes in balance begin early in the disease and are initially mild. Balance problems become worse as the disease progresses.

How can I improve my balance?

- The best way to maintain and improve balance is to start exercising early to prevent or slow the changes in balance due to Parkinson disease.
- See a physical therapist early to get an individualized home exercise program. Balance training that is supervised by a physical therapist is recommended over general exercise.
- See a physical therapist as soon as you note changes in your balance for therapy to improve your balance.

What should be included in a physical therapy program to improve balance?

- **Practice makes perfect.** Practice balance by doing things like:
 - Standing with your feet close together, one in front of the other, or on one foot.
 - Practice standing and/or walking on different surfaces such as a soft mat, grass, an uneven surface, and up and down inclines (eg. ramps, hills).
 - Working on balancing with your eyes closed or in a dark room.
- **Walk it out.** Practice walking to improve things like:
 - Practice walking around obstacles.
 - Practice walking while doing something else like counting backwards or carrying a cup of water.
- **Pump up your strength.** Work on improving strength in weak muscles and/or in your leg muscles specifically.
- **Aquatic therapy.** You can do balance training in a pool if you prefer that environment. You may feel safer practicing balance in the water.



How do I maintain the gains I made in physical therapy and work on balance on my own?

- Attend a group exercise program in your community, or online, as this has been shown to be an effective way to maintain the gains from therapy and to reduce fall risk.
- Perform a home exercise program after attending physical therapy. Your program should
 - Be ongoing.
 - Include balance exercises 2 to 3 times a week for at least 30 minutes.
 - Include exercises for balance and mobility.
 - Optimally prescribed by your physical therapist.

Considerations related to safety:

- Take appropriate precautions to prevent falls such as having a care partner present to help, using assistive devices as needed.
 - Only perform exercises your doctor or therapist have deemed safe for you to perform.

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