



# The PNMD Beat

February, 2020



## **SIX WAYS TO REDUCE PARKINSON'S FREEZING OF GAIT**

By, Dr. Sarah King, PT, DPT as written for the Davis Phinney Foundation for Parkinson's

### **#1 – TRAIN WITH A PARKINSON'S PHYSICAL THERAPIST**

The very best way to avoid a freezing episode is by working with a Parkinson's physical therapist to specifically address your freezing symptoms.

Your therapist will evaluate your unique triggers and symptoms and guide you through an exercise program that incorporates cognitive challenges and physical training. This will help retrain your brain to use more effective walking patterns and reduce freezing episodes.

### **#2 – WEAR THE RIGHT SHOES**

Shoes that are easy to slide on may solve one problem but cause another. When your shoes are too large, too loose or lack proper support, they can cause your feet to slide around inside your shoes or toes to curl under to help stabilize yourself.

This lack of stability and impaired balance can trigger your freezing symptoms and leave you stuck, not to mention at a significantly higher risk for falling. Choose supportive and well fitting shoes with a closed toe and heel.

### **#3 – WALK WITH INTENTION**

Walking has always been automatic, but due to lack of dopamine (Parkinson's hallmark trait), your brain now needs to focus more attentively on putting one foot in front of the other. When you are walking in a space that may trigger you to freeze, try drawing attention to your walk with some of these strategies.

Stand up tall and pick a destination in the distance you'd like to walk to. For example, the end of the hallway or around the bed and into the closet. Say aloud how many steps you think it will take to get there. Start with one large step and count each step you take aloud until you reach your destination.

If you're able to, place horizontal lines on the floor with painters tape. This can be a great visual aid to cue you where to step in narrow spaces. Aim to step over the line, hitting with your heel. Cut down on distractions and multi-tasking. Remove rugs and anything else on the floor that could distract you while you walk, including small animals. Avoid carrying anything in your hands or talking on the phone when you're walking. This will allow you to focus fully on where to place your feet.

#### **#4 – KEEP YOUR FEET WIDE**

Freezing is most common when you are turning or changing directions. Typically, your feet end up close together and, thus, your ability to shift your weight from one foot to another is diminished. When you're turning, imagine you have a small balloon between your feet you don't want to step on. If you're changing directions, do so with a wide stance or your feet staggered one in front of the other.

#### **#5 – KEEP YOUR HEAD UP**

Try this experiment: Stand up and look toward the horizon. Feel where your weight is distributed in your feet. It should be evenly distributed front to back and side to side. Now, look down at the floor between your feet. Did you feel your weight shift into your toes?

If your weight is in your toes, it can exacerbate festination and freezing. Instead, walk with your head up and shoulders back, redistributing the weight through your feet. You should be able to lift and wiggle your toes. If you have to temporarily peek down at the floor (say, to look at a horizontal line to step over) that's okay, just make sure to look up as you get going.

#### **#6 – SHAKE OFF YOUR STRESS**

Freezing episodes are more frequent and intense when you're anxious. Anxiety leads you to tense up your hands, arms, shoulders and jaw which raises stress in your body and feeds your freezing, making you even more anxious!

To combat this vicious cycle, deliberately give your body a good shake before you start walking. Start with loosening and shaking your hands, arms, shoulders, neck and tongue. Take a deep breath, stay as relaxed as possible and set out towards your destination!

#### **Once you're frozen, how do you get unstuck?**

The strategies above will help you prevent a freezing episode from occurring, but inevitably you'll find yourself frozen somewhere. What to do then?

**I teach all of my clients the “5S” Method for getting unstuck from a freezing episode:**

**STOP**

**STAND TALL**

**SHAKE IT OFF**

**SHIFT YOUR WEIGHT**

**STEP**