

BALANCING AND FALLING

Parkinson's disease (PD) affects the parts of the brain controlling balance and coordination. As a result, balance and coordination adjustments that were once automatic now require conscious effort. As well, some drugs used to treat PD can lower blood pressure, causing a feeling of faintness when getting up from a sitting or lying position. Difficulty with balance and/or low blood pressure can increase the risk for falling and fractures, both of which can be serious. Here are a few suggestions for coping with problems with balance:

- Have your blood pressure checked to ensure that it is not too low.
- Remove throw rugs and low-lying obstacles from pathways inside and outside your home.
- Avoid using stepladders and stools.
- Never stand still when you can sit down, particularly after exercise.
- Don't get up from a meal or out of bed too quickly.
- Use a cane with a large base or walker with brakes. Get professional advice before you make a major purchase.
- When walking, stand as straight as you can and walk with your feet a little wider apart than normal.
- Wear comfortable shoes with good arch supports. If you shuffle, avoid shoes with rubber or crepe soles. Leather patent shoes are a better option.
- Pay careful attention to changes in ground surfaces (e.g., curb to pavement or carpet to bare floor).
- Consult a physiotherapist. A therapist can assess your overall safety and mobility and also teach you and your partner what to do if you fall.

Call Parkinson Society Southwestern Ontario and ask about the exercises for people with Parkinson's or for more information on maintaining balance and reducing the risk of falls.

Parkinson Society Southwestern Ontario gratefully acknowledges Parkinson Society British Columbia for sharing their resources and information.

Source: Pacific Parkinson's Research Centre, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC