

Living with Advanced Parkinson's

Exercises to help with activities of daily living

Introduction

by John Molyneux, Molyfit instructor

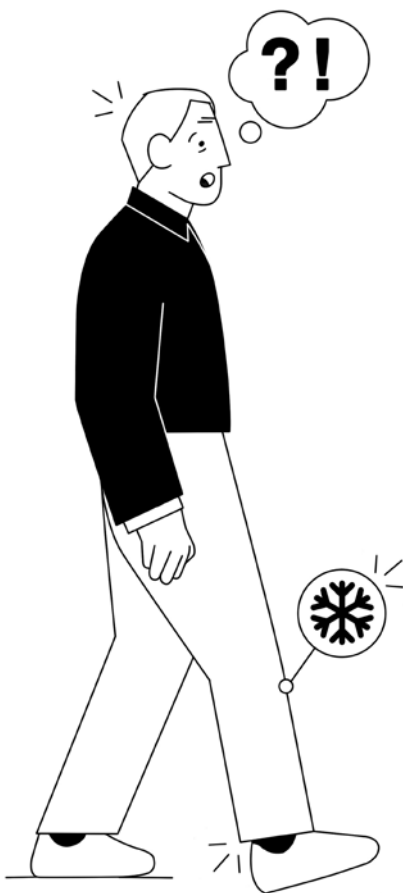
Each person with Parkinson's presents with their own symptoms, and the progression of those symptoms will be at a rate unique to you. This can change day to day.

The advanced stage of Parkinson's is when your symptoms start to have a greater effect on your day-to-day life and activities of daily living (ADLs). This can make life more challenging and you may need assistance.

In this booklet you will find some useful tips to help you with the ADLs that you may be struggling with.

I have been working with a dear friend of mine who is now in this situation. Each day seems to bring a new and different set of challenges, so it is not easy to remember which techniques we use for specific problems. We thought a brief self-help guide would be useful for him, and we hope it will help others too.

Here it is...



Freezing

Sometimes and without warning the body can freeze. This can happen in a wide range of situations such as trying to stand up from a seated position or walking through a doorway or along a corridor. The cause is not known but we have found hesitation is a contributing factor, especially when initiating a movement. We try to eliminate hesitation by keeping confidence levels high and doing repeated movement drills. We carry out daily sit to stand, posture and other movement exercises, not only to keep the muscles strong, but also to develop a positive mental attitude.

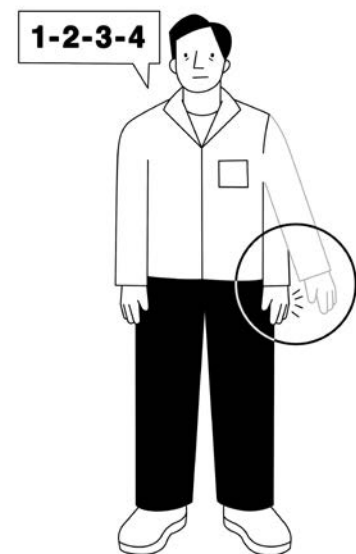
Freezing will make you feel anxious, creating hesitation. This can worsen your symptoms, such as bringing on tremor or making your muscles tighten. This in turn can make the task you are trying to do feel impossible. Believing that you can do it and having confidence in your own ability will help you get through it.

Hit restart

If freezing happens to you, try to clear your mind and **hit your restart button**. You can do this by taking your thoughts away from the situation. With practice you will eventually find the best solution that works for you. For example, try looking back at a strong memory such as your favourite holiday or a significant family event. If at home, you could try looking at a picture on the wall or an ornament on the shelf and try to remember where you got it from and its cost. Whatever it is you choose to do, take your mind away and out of the anxiety and panic mode that freezing can cause.

Cueing

Once you have done this, add in some **cueing**. This is an amazing tool that will give you back your power. Cueing provides an external trigger that can help to start a movement. It works by activating the motor cortex, a part of the brain that helps with movement. Examples of cueing are singing a song, listening to your favourite music or counting to 5 either out loud or in your head. Try to make the cues rhythmic, like a metronome. You need to find the cue that works best for you. In our case, counting out loud to 5 whilst tapping the side of the body (when standing) or thigh (when sitting) has the best success rate.



You can also add visual cues. Placing some tape on the floor to step over to guide your footsteps can be useful in areas where you freeze, such as corridors or a change in floor surface.

Dual tasking

Be aware of **dual tasking**. This is your ability to perform two tasks simultaneously. It is common to have more difficulty performing dual tasks with Parkinson's, so it is useful to practise this. Be aware of walking and talking, or walking and carrying an object. An exercise to try is marching on the spot whilst clapping your hands in front at chest height with straight arms, arms returning to your side after each clap.

Climbing stairs

Climbing stairs is a great way of keeping your muscles strong but can feel like an impossible task when your body is misbehaving. Remember this: *If the mind can believe it, the body can achieve it*. To climb the stairs, stand in front of them and out loud say, 'I am climbing those stairs'.

As you begin the movement, count with each step. Your count will be individual to you. It might be saying 1-step-2-step-3-step-4 or 1-step-2-step. We have found a strong and loud 1-step-2-step works best for us, but yours might be as simple as singing your favourite tune. You really want to create rhythm with your movement to get rid of the dreaded hesitation.

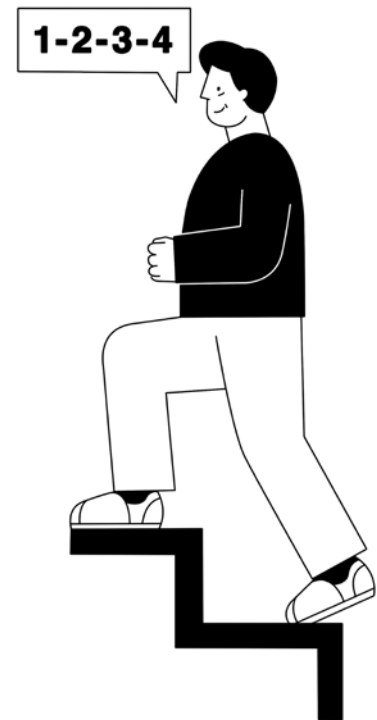
Another useful tip for stairs is to put the lights on. Make sure that the stairs are visible and clear. Make sure that the stairs are visible and clear. If you have visuospatial problems (e.g. misjudging steps), contrasting coloured tape on the edges of the steps can be useful.

Some people with Parkinson's may experience hallucinations or delusions. The floor can feel like it's moving under your feet, or you may see insects or words on the ground beneath you. If this happens to you, try to recognise that it is not real. Distract your mind by hitting reset and cueing as discussed earlier.

Standing up from a chair

If freezing occurs when trying to stand from a seated position, here is the checklist to get you through it.

- ▶ Hit your mind's reset button.
- ▶ Make sure your body is straight and centred, not twisted.
- ▶ Begin cueing and tell yourself you *will* stand up from the chair.
- ▶ Start the movement by rocking your body forwards and back from the hips.
- ▶ As you rock, slide forwards, away from the back of the chair, taking your bottom as near to the edge as feels safe.
- ▶ Keep your heels back, the whole of your feet on the floor and use a forwards and up motion.
- ▶ When standing, thrust your hips forward, bum tight and head up. Try not to use your hands to stand if possible.



Balance

If you find your balance becomes more challenging, you can try to improve it by reducing your **base of support**. You can find more information on this by downloading my free book *Move Yourself to Better Health*. Start with trying to do this for 5 seconds, with the aim to build up to 30 seconds.

www.molyfit.co.uk/move-yourself-to-better-health

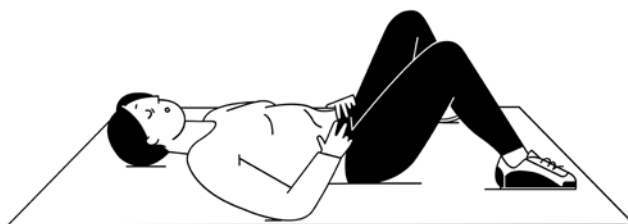
Getting out of bed

After lying in bed and being in the same position for a long time, you may find getting up difficult due to tension and spasms in your muscles. One of the main symptoms of Parkinson's is stiff and inflexible muscles and this can be worsened with extended sitting and lying. First, try to release the muscle spasms with movement. Remember, *movement is medicine*.

Pelvic tilts

Start with **pelvic tilts**. The pelvic tilt will loosen the back and larger muscles that can upset your mobility, and the stretch after will help ease the tension.

- ▶ Lie on your back with your knees bent.
- ▶ Flatten your back against the bed by tightening your abdominal muscles and bending your pelvis up slightly. Hold for 2 seconds. Repeat this 5 times.



Stretch

Now you have woken the muscles up, give them a gentle **stretch**.

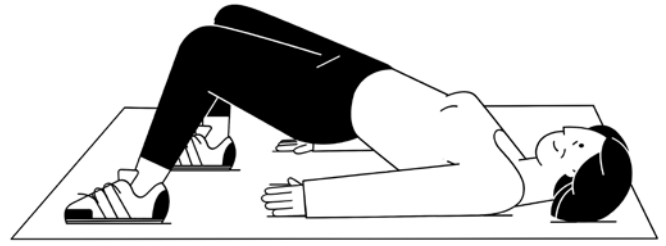
- ▶ Lie on your back, feet flat on the bed with your knees bent.
- ▶ Maintaining a neutral spine, lower your right leg so it's flat on the bed. Keep your core muscles activated and breathe in.
- ▶ As you exhale, gently raise your right leg off the bed to a position that feels natural. Don't force it, and try to keep the rest of your body relaxed.
- ▶ Hold the stretch for 20 to 30 seconds and feel the muscles easing off. Repeat on the other leg.



Bridge

Now move onto a **bridge**.

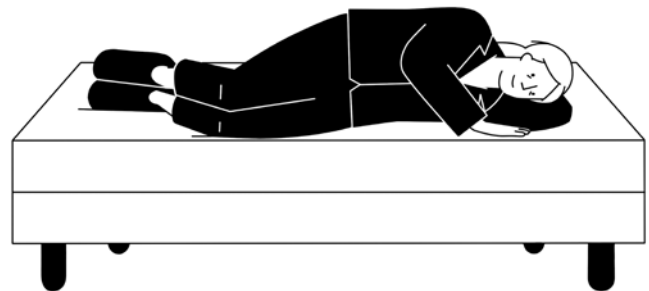
- ▶ Lie on your back with your knees bent, feet hip distance apart and arms by your sides.
- ▶ Take in a few deep breaths, relaxing your upper body. Engage your core and, maintaining a neutral spine, breathe in.
- ▶ As you exhale, use your core and bottom muscles to lift your bottom gently off the bed, placing your body weight onto your shoulder blades.



You will feel the muscles at the back of your thighs working. If you feel anything stronger than a pull, like the muscles beginning to cramp, gently lower yourself down and stretch your hamstrings again. You should aim to hold the bridge for 10–20 seconds without dropping your bottom, keeping your core engaged and spine neutral.

Tips for turning over in bed

- ▶ Bend your knees up with feet flat on the bed.
- ▶ Let the knees fall to the side as you begin to roll.
- ▶ Turn your head in the direction you are rolling and reach your top arm across your body in the direction you are rolling.



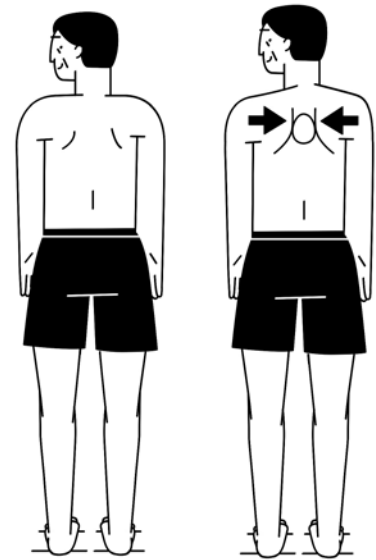
Posture

To win the battle against poor posture you **must** practise being mindful of it daily. Parkinson's affects the brain's automatic reminder to stand up straight. Your body forgets to do it, so you will need to remind it. Good posture is important as it will make you less likely to fall, but it will also help with backache. Back pain dramatically reduces mobility, so if the back is happy, your movement will be much better. We find that placing markers in the home, acting as **memory joggers** to straighten up, is a great way to keep on top of good posture.

A simple but effective **posture exercise** is to stand with your back against a wall, tighten your buttocks and place your shoulders and head against the wall. Gently hold this position for 30 seconds and feel your body lifting. If your neck is too tight

and uncomfortable and is unable to reach the wall, place a cushion behind it for extra support.

We also practise **squeezing the egg**. Imagine an egg between your shoulder blades and, with minimal shoulder movement, try to squeeze the egg with your upper back muscles. Don't squeeze too hard – you don't want to break the egg! Squeeze for 5 seconds then release, repeating 5 times. This exercise forces you to straighten up and strengthens the muscles responsible for keeping you upright.



Walking

Parkinson's can cause bradykinesia, where your movement becomes slow and difficult. When walking, add in the use of **attentional strategies** like using BIG steps, intentional arm swings and leading with the heels.

Walking every day is essential as it keeps the body going. We really notice the difference when we haven't walked, usually down to bad weather. We always use Nordic poles when we walk. They provide comfort and stability but more importantly allow us to maintain a rhythm.



Heavy legs

If you find your legs feel heavy, try the *movement is medicine* approach. These three techniques will help.

Ankle mobility

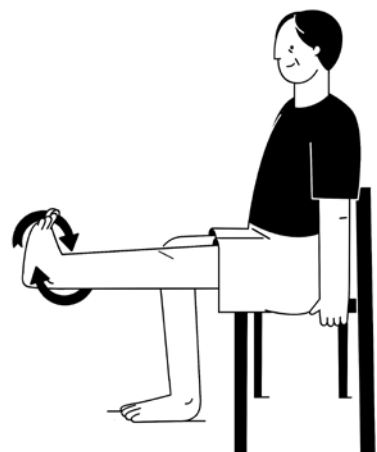
- ▶ Point your toes away from you (plantarflex), holding for a count of 2, then point your toes towards you (dorsiflex) and hold for 2 counts.
- ▶ Repeat 10 times on each foot, counting with a strong rhythm.

As your toes travel towards you, your calf muscles (in the back of your leg between your ankle and knee) will tighten. How much your foot moves depends on the amount of tension stored in your calf.



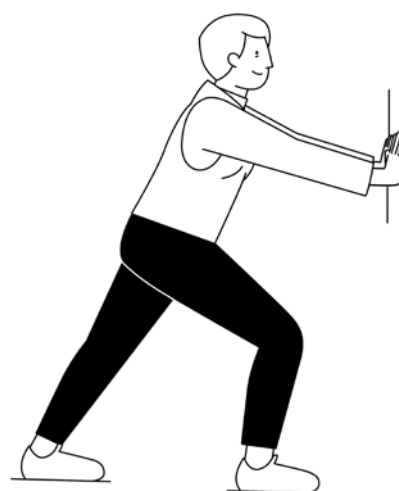
The looser your calf, the more movement you will have in your foot. It is beneficial to stretch your calf muscles daily. The best time is after a walk or activity when the muscles are warm.

Next rotate each foot at the ankle 10 times in one direction and then 10 times in the other. Aim for large circles with minimal hesitation. Look out for a smooth, easy movement. If the movement is difficult and stutters, slow it down and try to relax. Breathe with the exercise so that you control your body, rather than your body controlling you. Practise this regularly as it is important to maintain good ankle mobility for walking.



Calf stretch

- ▶ Using the wall for support, place both palms onto the wall and stand with your feet hip distance apart.
- ▶ Take a step back with one leg, as far as it can go with your heel pressed firmly into the floor.
- ▶ Lean forward into the bent thigh of your other leg. Make sure both feet are facing straight forward and keep your back heel glued to the floor.
- ▶ Hold the stretch for 20 seconds. Repeat with the other leg.



Thigh stretch

- ▶ Standing, take a towel and place it around your right ankle.
- ▶ Keep your head forward so as not to strain your neck.
- ▶ Using your right arm, pull the towel towards your bottom, bending your knee.
- ▶ Keep your knees touching each other and your chest facing forward.
- ▶ When you can feel a stretch in the front of your thigh and you can't pull any more, gently push your hips forward. This will intensify the stretch and you should feel a strong pull in your quad/thigh muscle.
- ▶ Hold the stretch for 20 seconds.
- ▶ Repeat on the other side.

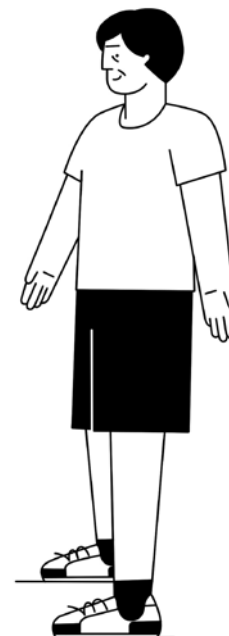


If you find this stretch is too difficult, repeat the calf stretch and push your hips forward at the same time to stretch the quads.

Tremors in the arms

There is no cure for tremor, but we have found coping mechanisms to manage it. Tremors may be aggravated by physical and emotional stress, anxiety and fatigue. We have found that light activity to promote relaxation and distract the mind helps to reduce tremor. You will find your own personal coping strategy. It might be bouncing a ball or pillow slams, but our coping strategy is **arm swings**.

- ▶ Stand tall, remembering your posture, with buttocks tight and shoulders relaxed.
- ▶ With your arms by your side, point your fingers to the floor and straighten your elbows and wrists.
- ▶ Swing your arms keeping your shoulders as relaxed as possible so the movement is light and not forced. You are trying to relax the upper body and loosen the muscles, so let the movement become as natural as possible.
- ▶ Do this for 20 seconds then shrug your shoulders 5 times, bringing them up and down towards the ears then the floor.

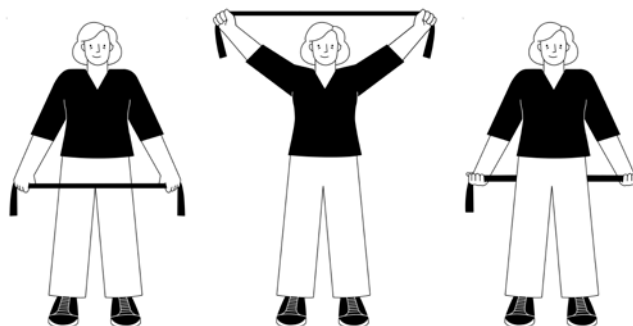


Other things that may help are manipulating small objects or finger flicking to distract the tremor. You can also use pressure, like sitting on your hands, or applying force through the limb, such as pushing against a wall. Opening and closing your hands with power and using weighted objects such as cutlery and pens can also help.

All-in-one posture and shoulder loosener

A good daily posture exercise to try is to place you back against a wall and, with your thumbs crossed, pull your arms up and try to reach the wall over your head. You may not get there the first time, but with practice it can be possible. When you can do this, a more advanced exercise to try is the **all-in-one posture and shoulder loosener**.

We do this exercise daily. This exercise helps maintain posture, keeps the legs straight, works on balance and coordination and helps to relieve muscle spasms throughout the body.



Using a light resistance band:

- ▶ Stand with feet hip distance apart and the band in both hands. The tension of the band is not important, so make sure it is not too tight. There wants to be enough slack so that you can complete the movement with minimal effort in your shoulders and arms.
- ▶ Tighten your buttocks and push your knees gently back so the legs remain straight.
- ▶ Lift your chin so your neck is not bent, with your eyes facing forwards.
- ▶ With straight arms, lift the band up to the top of your head. Gently pull on the band and lift it over your head, all the way around to your lower back.
- ▶ Reverse direction to end up in the front again with the band down by your thighs.
- ▶ Repeat 5 times.

Keep going

The key to managing your symptoms is consistency. Try to do the exercises every day. They don't need to be done all at once. You can do them individually throughout the day as and when suits you, but do try to develop a daily routine.

Keep fighting and maintain a positive mental attitude, believing in your ability.

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