Festination

Festination, or shuffling gait, is a common motor symptom in Parkinson's. Management strategies include physiotherapy, gait training, falls prevention strategies and optimising your medications.

What is festination?

Festination is a motor symptom of Parkinson's where walking becomes hurried and unsteady. People affected by shuffling gait may take short, rapid steps that feel involuntary and uncontrolled, often leaning forward with a stooped posture. This happens because the centre of gravity shifts too far forward, prompting the body to take quick steps to avoid falling.

A shuffling gait is a motor symptom in which you take small, rapid steps that can result in a tendency to move forward uncontrollably, like a run, to prevent falling.

A stooped posture gait pattern occurs because the body's centre of gravity is too far forward, often making a forward-leaning posture.

It is a very common and characteristic gait disturbance for people with Parkinson's. Festination can make walking difficult and increase the risk of falls. It can feel like an involuntary acceleration of walking, with your steps becoming quicker and shorter. The severity of festination can vary, with some experiencing mild episodes and others facing more severe, uncontrollable episodes that may require an assistive device. Festination becomes more frequent as the condition progresses.

Treatments & strategies

Managing festination involves a combination of therapies and lifestyle adjustments.

- **Gait training:** Techniques like rhythmic cueing (e.g., stepping to a beat) help regulate walking speed and step training helps to enhance individual's stepping response. They are usually delivered by a trained physiotherapist or exercise physiologist.
- **Medication review:** Optimising Parkinson's medications can reduce motor symptoms that contribute to festination and consequently your safety.
- **Assistive devices:** Walking aids prescribed by your occupational therapist (OT), like rollators may improve stability and confidence.

Confident walking strategies

- **Think before you move:** Pause and plan your steps before starting.
- **Use visual cues:** Place tape or markers on the floor to guide step length. Alternatively, use the floor pattern in your favour, stepping onto lines on the floor or over them.
- **Step to a rhythm:** Use music or a metronome to maintain pace.
- **Avoid multitasking:** Focus solely on walking to reduce risk of freezing or festination.

Falls prevention tips

- **Declutter your space:** Remove trip hazards like rugs and cords.
- **Install grab rails:** Especially in bathrooms and stairways.

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