



Breaking a Freezing Episode

One in three people with Parkinson's experience freezing episodes, usually when doing repetitive activities, or when you are multitasking. But how do you break free?

WHY DOES FREEZING HAPPEN?

Freezing of gait (FOG) is the result of the degeneration of neurons in the substantia nigra which are responsible for initiating movement.

Conditions that worsen freezing episodes in the brain are amplified when the person is experiencing fatigue, stress or anxiety.

Freezing can happen anywhere and at any time, but walking through doorways and turning around are common triggers.

For a person with Parkinson's, freezing is not simply frustrating, it can be dangerous by leading to decreased mobility and falls.

COMING UNSTUCK

Giving your brain time to use another neural pathway is an effective way to come "unstuck", as the automatic response is no longer readily available. Typically, people start moving by making use of some cues.

Cues could be something simple, like a laser pointer, or simply by concentrating on walking.

When attempting to break from a freezing episode, it is important to adopt a mindfulness approach of being more

aware of the task in hand.

Apply the following four-step technique developed by Dr Sarah King (PhD):

1. Stop to Stand

The next time you find yourself stuck in a movement, the first thing to do is stop moving and stand tall.

Lift your head up and squeeze your shoulders back, till your back is completely flat. Doing so will put you in the optimal position to get moving again.

2. Shake it off

Take a deep breath and try to relax any part of your body where you may be holding tension, usually your hands, jaw or neck.

By decreasing your anxiety levels, your brain can focus more keenly on the task at hand.

3. Shift your weight

If you are standing start moving your hips, slowly rocking back and forth on your heels, to shift your weight alternatively between your right and left foot.

If you are sitting, then move your shoulders backward and forward, lifting yourself off the chair slightly to shift your weight between your buttocks and your feet.

Regardless of whether you are sitting or standing, ensure that you try to keep your back straight.

4. Step Up

If you are standing, use a rocking motion to lift your knee up high and take a massive marching step forward. Ensure that you are placing your foot ahead carefully, in order to maintain your centre of gravity.

If you are sitting, bring your nose over your toes, reach forward and spring up to stand.

The key is to ensure that you are making a large, exaggerated movement to break

the freezing episode. Talk with your neurologist or movement disorder specialist about other ways to manage freezing episodes.

Your doctor may be able to refer you to a physical therapist who specializes in treating the gait problems and freezing associated with Parkinson's.

SOURCE:

Dr Sarah King (PhD in Physical Therapy),
Invigorate Physical Therapy & Wellness

The Michael J. Fox Foundation, “5 Tricks to Move Through Freezing Episodes in Parkinson's Disease”