

## A drug trial to improve balance and prevent falls



### Project information

Lead researcher	Dr Emily Henderson
Location	University of Bristol
Cost	£249,998 over 3 years
Start date	April 2011
Type of project	Training Fellowship
Project code	F-1003

### Project background

Problems with balance and falling affect many people with Parkinson's. A quarter of people with Parkinson's fall at least once a month, and they are twice as likely to fall as older people without the condition.

- **Falls are often triggered by 'freezing'.** Freezing is when people stop suddenly, and can last for a few seconds or minutes. If this happens, it might feel as though your feet are stuck to the floor or that you can't move easily, which can make you feel unsteady. This can increase your risk of falling over.
- **Problems with balance and falls seriously affect quality of life.** Falls can lead to injuries that mean people need to go to hospital and can also make people feel anxious about falling again. Unfamiliar or busy places seem more daunting and many people stop doing the hobbies and activities they previously enjoyed.
- **Problems with thinking seem to make these problems worse.** People with Parkinson's who also have problems with thinking may find it harder to multi-task. So

things like walking while talking, or walking with a tray of drinks, can cause people to lose their balance.

Falls are a very common problem for people with Parkinson's but there are currently no medical treatments available that help improve balance and prevent falls.

This study will investigate whether drugs that improve attention and thinking can help to prevent people with Parkinson's falling.

### What the researchers are doing

In Emily's study people with Parkinson's who are prone to balance problems and falls will be randomly divided into two groups. One group will have a drug patch containing rivastigmine - a drug used to treat mild to moderate dementia. The other group will have an identical patch that doesn't contain any active drug.

Both groups will complete memory tests and walking tests before starting treatment and then after 4, 24 and 28 weeks of treatment. Participants will also wear a small pedometer device at home for 2 days and record any 'freezing' episodes by pressing a button on a wristwatch. Participants will then receive monthly follow-up phone calls and be asked to complete a 'falls diary' to help Emily continue to monitor the rates of falls.

### How the research will help people with Parkinson's

By the end of Emily's project she hopes to know whether drugs that improve thinking and attention have potential for preventing falls in people with Parkinson's. This could lead on to larger trials and the development of effective medications that improve balance and help to prevent people with Parkinson's from falling.

### For more information, please talk to the Research Team

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