Taking positive steps to prevent falls

**Project information**

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<tr>
<th>Lead researcher</th>
<th>Dr Katherine Baker</th>
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<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Northumbria University</td>
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<td>Cost</td>
<td>£38,592 over 2 years</td>
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<td>Start date</td>
<td>January 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>Type of project</td>
<td>Small grant</td>
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<td>Project code</td>
<td>K-1505</td>
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**Project background**

Staying physically active is vital for keeping mind and body generally fit and healthy. And now there is a growing awareness that exercise is especially important for people with Parkinson’s. It may even help to prevent one of the most devastating aspects of Parkinson’s – falls – which are extremely difficult to manage.

- **In a recent Parkinson’s UK project, problems with balance and falls emerged as the top priority for improving everyday life for people affected.** Many people with Parkinson’s will experience a fall at some point during the course of their condition. Falls don’t just lead to physical injuries. They affect the individual’s confidence and quality of life, and increase stress for friends and family members.

- **Staying physically active may help to reduce risk of falling for people with Parkinson’s.** But people with the condition tend not to achieve recommended levels of physical activity and are less active than people of the same age without Parkinson’s. There are many reasons that people may become increasingly inactive, including motor symptoms, fatigue and loss of confidence.
• To encourage people with Parkinson’s to stay active and reduce their risk of falls we need to understand the barriers to physical activity. Maintaining or increasing physical activity is an important aspect of taking control of the condition but one which is difficult to achieve for many people with Parkinson’s.

What the project will do

First, the team will look to see what services aimed at increasing physical activity are available and appropriate for people with Parkinson’s within the North Tyneside area.

Next they will recruit 20 people with Parkinson’s who live at home, are able to walk (with or without a walking aid) and have reported problems with their balance or falls in the previous year as well as 20 people of a similar age who do not have Parkinson’s.

All the participants will complete an initial assessment of their walking, balance, levels of physical activity and some basic cognitive tests. Then, over a five day period, they will be asked to wear:
- an activity monitor to record their movement (number of steps, changes of position)
- a small body worn camera which automatically takes photos at regular intervals

Finally, the researcher will carry out an interview within one week of the recordings to explore in more detail the specific factors which influence participants’ activity levels and how these may be involved in falls.

How the research will help people with Parkinson’s

Katherine hopes her study will shed new light on the complex relationship between physical activity and falls in Parkinson’s. And that the new knowledge this study produces will empower people with the condition to manage their condition more effectively and reduce their risk of falling.

Find out more about our research, visit our website: parkinsons.org.uk/research
Or contact the Parkinson’s UK research team at: research@parkinsons.org.uk