

## Huntington's Disease Balance and Walking Training Fact Sheet

### **How is balance and walking affected in Huntington's disease?**

Balance and walking problems are common for people with Huntington's disease (HD), even early in the disease and even before diagnosis. Early signs that you might be having a balance or walking problem are trips and stumbles, and difficulty maintaining balance when standing on one leg or while you are doing two or more things at the same time, such as walking and talking or walking while holding something like a laundry basket in your arms. As the balance and walking problems worsen over time you will be at higher risk of falling.

### **When should you see a physiotherapist for balance and walking problems?**

All persons with HD are advised to go to physiotherapy as early as possible. A physiotherapist can perform an evaluation and recommend an exercise program. This may include balance and walking training, that may prevent or slow the decline in your balance and physical activity problems. You should also go to physiotherapy if you notice a decline in balance and/or walking in a relatively short period of time or if you are experiencing more falls than usual.

### **What can a physiotherapist do if you have balance and walking problems?**

Physiotherapists are trained to assess balance and walking performance and determine whether you have balance or walking problems and if you are at risk of falling. There is typically more than one reason for unsteadiness or falls. Once the cause(s) are identified, the physiotherapist can provide a treatment plan to meet your goals and address your specific needs. It is important to understand that fear of falling and lack of movement actually increases the risk of a fall. Therefore, it is best to work with a physiotherapist to help you safely move in whatever environment you typically are in and to decrease your risk of falls. The good news is that people with HD can improve their balance with the help of the physiotherapist.

## **What treatments may physiotherapists recommend for balance and walking problems?**

The type of treatment that a physiotherapist will recommend will vary according to the person's function and lifestyle, and to the type of balance or walking problem the person is having. For some problems the physiotherapist may recommend specific exercises that challenge the person's balance control (e.g., standing or walking with feet close together with or without eyes open), or repeated practice of tasks that the person is having difficulty doing (e.g., going sitting to standing or walking up/down stairs). If the person falls frequently, the physiotherapist might recommend ways to prevent falls, such as using a handrail on stairs or using a device such as a rollator walker when walking.

## **Where can I find physiotherapists that treat people with HD having balance and walking problems?**

In Europe, you can find physiotherapists with expertise in care of people with HD through the European Huntington's Disease Network and HD associations within each country. For general information about how to stay active with HD, visit this website:

<http://eurohuntington.org/active-huntingtons/>

For persons with HD living in the United States, search for therapists who specialize in neurologic physical therapy on this website: <https://www.choosept.com/find-a-pt> .

## **Resources**

Videos of exercises and activities can be found at:

<https://eurohuntington.org/active-huntingtons/>

[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCH7\\_ed2\\_mkzXNWPZqVlosw](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCH7_ed2_mkzXNWPZqVlosw)

<https://u.osu.edu/mend/move-to-improve/>