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Last Updated: Sunday, 27 February, 2005, 00:52 GMT

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## Parkinson's hope over 'glasses'

**A pair of glasses which use virtual imagery could help people with Parkinson's disease cope with walking problems, scientists say.**

The device uses light to project images in front of the user, helping them to focus and control their movement.



Many people with Parkinson's experience problems walking

Researchers at Oxford Computer Consultants are now putting the headset forward for clinical trials.

Many people with Parkinson's have mobility problems but only one in 20 will benefit from the headsets.

People with Parkinson's, a degenerative brain disease which affects 3% of people over 75, do not produce enough dopamine - a chemical messenger responsible for allowing humans to control their movement.

Some people with the disease suffer from freezing, which renders them unable to move once they stop.

The headset, which could cost £1,400, works by producing visual clues - an accepted method of combating freezing.

People with Parkinson's who freeze can be prompted to start walking again if objects are placed in their way and they have to walk round them.

Lights from the headset create a tunnel-effect, which enabled users in the initial testing stage to focus on the virtual imagery and move more freely.

### Quality of life

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“ It has been known for some time that visual cues can assist in overcoming these distressing problems and this innovative use of technology may provide a novel solution ”

Robert Medowcroft, of the Parkinson's Disease Society

Project co-ordinator Reynold Greenlaw said: "This is a major achievement, especially when you take into account that falling is the second greatest cause of death in people with Parkinson's disease.

"It has an enormous effect on their quality of life and does not rely on any drugs or surgery."

Peter Walters, of the EU research and technology team which is helping to fund the project, said the headsets had the potential to "improve the quality of life" of many people.

"This is another example of how technology is being developed into applications that reach way beyond what are considered the normal boundaries of computer buffs."

And Robert Medowcroft, director of policy at the Parkinson's Disease Society, said the headsets were "encouraging".

"Those people with the condition who experience problems with 'freezing' and then starting to walk may find this device to be very helpful.

"It has been known for some time that visual cues can assist in overcoming these distressing problems and this innovative use of technology may provide a novel solution."

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