

Vertigo

69 million Americans have problems with dizziness and balance¹

Dizziness is a common condition that includes feeling imbalanced, lightheaded, or vertigo. Vertigo is the sensation of spinning or moving, even though you are still. You may also experience nausea, vomiting, and nystagmus (abnormal eye movements).

If you experience symptoms that include double vision, arm or leg weakness, and/or difficulty speaking, you should be evaluated immediately in the Emergency Department.

Vestibular System

The vestibular system is located in the inner ear and provides important information to the balance system. The balance system uses information from the vestibular, visual, and proprioceptive systems to maintain balance, spatial orientation, and perceive motion.

Causes of Dizziness

Dizziness can happen for many reasons, but often because of problems with the vestibular system.

Common causes of dizziness include:

- Inner ear infections
- Headaches, migraines
- Benign paroxysmal positional vertigo (BPPV) or positional vertigo
- Ménière's disease

Other causes of dizziness include: low blood pressure, medications, arthritis or joint problems, tumors, stroke, and head injury. Sometimes there is no known cause for dizziness.

Associated Conditions

- Hearing loss
- Tinnitus (ringing in the ears)
- Headache
- Motion sickness
- Unsteadiness/imbalance

How is Dizziness Diagnosed?

Your doctor may send you for a variety of examinations including imaging, laboratory tests, a hearing evaluation and balance and inner ear testing. You may also be referred to a physician who specializes in ear disorders known as an otolaryngologist or an otologist.

How is Dizziness Treated?

Dizziness treatment depends on the cause. If a condition can be found, your doctor will help determine how to manage and/or treat that condition. Some conditions may be with medication or dietary changes. Other condition may be managed through a specific form of physical therapy known as vestibular rehabilitation. Vestibular rehabilitation uses various maneuvers and exercises to help reduce symptoms. Some patients find relief using anti-vertigo medications, but these can make you drowsy and increase your risk of falls.

Questions to Ask Your Provider:

- Is there a cause for my dizziness?
- Can vestibular rehabilitation help me?
- Is it safe for me to drive?
- What can I do to reduce my risk of falling?

Role of Audiologists

Audiologists identify, diagnose, and provide treatment options for patients with vestibular disorders that lead to dizziness and imbalance. They work closely with physicians and physical therapists and are an important part of the dizziness management team.

Do you think you or a family member may have a vestibular / balance disorder? Click on the "Find an Audiologist" link at www.audiology.org to locate and set up an appointment with an Audiologist in your area.

¹ Agrawal Y, Carey JP, Della Santina CC, Schubert MC, Minor LB. 2009. Disorders of balance and vestibular function in US adults: data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, 2001-2004. Arch Intern Med 169(10): 938-944.