

Sarah Ziolkowski
Physical Therapist,
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Sarah completed her undergraduate course work at UW-La Crosse and obtained a Master's Degree from Carroll College, Waukesha. She is a physical therapist who specializes in treating balance and vestibular disorders. Sarah is Herdman certified in vestibular disorders. She has 14 years of experience as a physical therapist and over 10 years of experience treating vestibular disorders. She has treated a variety of conditions and finds practicing physical therapy extremely fulfilling and enjoys getting to know her patients.

Resources

Vestibular disorders are sometimes difficult to diagnose, and the related symptoms and problems are frequently misunderstood or unrecognized by others. The more informed people with vestibular disorders are, the better that they can manage their symptoms and communicate about their needs with family, friends and health professionals. The Vestibular Disorders Association (VEDA) can help by providing information on specific disorders and on issues related to diagnosis, testing, treatments and coping.

Other Sources for Information:
<http://www.vestibular.org>
<http://www.dizziness-and-balance.com>



*Getting balance back
in your life.*



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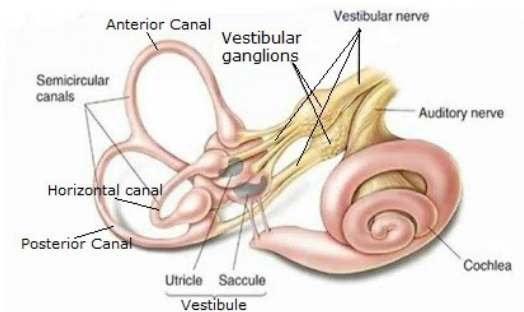
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**What are Vestibular
Disorders?
(Dizziness & Vertigo)**

- Symptoms
- Causes
- Diagnosis
- Treatment
- Prognosis
- Resources



Vestibular System

Symptoms

Symptoms of vestibular dysfunction may be mild, lasting perhaps only seconds or minutes, or they may be severe, resulting in total disability. Not all symptoms will be experienced by every person, and other symptoms are possible. Common symptoms of vestibular disorders are:

- Imbalance or unsteadiness
- Vertigo
- Dizziness
- Blurred or bouncing vision
- Nausea
- Hearing changes
- Problems with coordination, thinking and memory

Causes

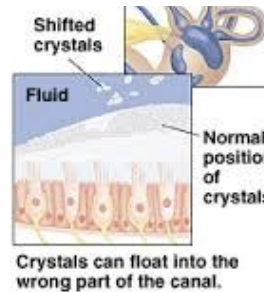
- Whiplash, concussions and other head trauma or injuries
- Sudden or significant pressure changes
- Degenerative changes to the vestibular system and brain
- Chronic or recurrent ear or sinus infections
- High doses or long term use of certain antibiotics



About half of all cases have no identifiable underlying cause. However, there are still treatments that may help reduce symptoms.

What is BPPV?

One of the most commonly diagnosed vestibular disorder is Benign Paroxysmal Positional Vertigo (BPPV). This is an inner ear problem that causes short periods of dizziness when your head is moved in certain positions. It occurs most commonly when lying down, turning over in bed and looking up. This dizzy sensation called *vertigo* usually only lasts a few seconds up to a minute, but often makes you feel like the room is spinning around you. It may also make you feel lightheaded, off balance and nauseous. The underlying cause of BPPV is crystals that are displaced in the inner ear canals.



What is Vestibular Neuritis?

Another commonly diagnosed vestibular disorder is Vestibular Neuritis, also known as Labyrinthitis. This affects the part of the inner ear that helps to control our body's balance. It can be caused by a bacteria or a virus that damages the vestibular nerve, which sends messages about movement and balance between the inner ear and the brain. The source of the virus can be an infection of the respiratory system or the gastrointestinal system. Initially you may feel sick but it is possible that you may be unaware that you even had an infection. Vestibular Neuritis may be caused by decreased blood flow in the inner ear, exposure to toxic agents, or allergic substances, all of which can damage the vestibular nerve.

Diagnosis

The diagnosis of a vestibular disorder relies on a combination of tests and careful inspection of the history of the problem. A complete physical examination by an experienced, certified provider is essential to rule out other causes of dizziness, such as cardiovascular or central nervous system disorders. If a person is then referred to a specialist, tests may be performed to measure hearing, eye movement and balance.

Treatment

Treatment can provide a complete cure for some, but in persistent cases, the symptoms can only be controlled, not eliminated entirely. Treatment varies according to the diagnosis, and may consist of head maneuvers, diet changes, a special form of physical therapy called vestibular rehabilitation therapy, prescribed drugs or equipment or in some cases surgery. *Seeing a therapist who has experience with vestibular disorders is critical. If left untreated, the result could be permanent vestibular damage.*



What to expect at your appointment

- Thorough history and review of your individual case
- Balance assessment
- Ocular motor exam
- Comprehensive inner ear evaluation utilizing infrared goggles