

Diagnose your dizziness

While most people simply say, “I feel dizzy” when describing their symptoms, it’s important for your doctor to know which type of dizziness you feel.

Lightheadedness

A feeling that you are about to faint or “pass out.” Although you may feel dizzy, you do not feel as though you or your surroundings are moving — usually not caused by a serious problem.

Vertigo

A feeling that you or your surroundings are moving when there is no actual movement — typically a symptom of a more serious, underlying condition.



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85410-007 9/14 BRO0330-01-EE-SG

Your Balance System

How your ears play a role.





Take balance issues seriously

Often taken for granted, good balance is necessary to perform daily activities. But our balance system is complex and delicate, and many things can contribute to loss of equilibrium or dizziness — including problems in the inner ear.

While balance problems can occur at any age, balance-related falls account for more than half of accidental deaths for people 65 and older, and over 300,000 hip fractures a year. That's why it's important to see a healthcare professional if you have balance issues — to diagnose the cause of your problems and begin treatment as soon as possible.

Balance 101

Vestibular organs — the paired set of tiny sensory organs located near the cochlea of the inner ear — are key to maintaining balance. They are filled with fluid (called endolymph) that moves when your head moves, placing pressure against tiny hairs in the inner ear.



Combined with information from the eyes, nerves and muscles, these tiny hairs send signals to the brain when the body's position is changing. The brain takes in all this information and coordinates the body to respond so a fall does not occur.

Why your balance might be off

Balance issues arise when something interrupts this coordinated process — and it's not uncommon for vestibular organs to be the culprit. Aging alone results in natural endolymph fluid loss as well as the sensitivity loss in your inner ear hairs. But illness, infections and head trauma can also cause equilibrium disorders and dizziness.

Common Equilibrium Disorders

Benign paroxysmal positional vertigo (BPPV)

The most common disorder of the inner ear's vestibular system, BPPV causes brief but intense episodes of vertigo as a result of changing position of your head (such as sitting up in bed). Causes of BPPV vary, from migraines and viruses to reactions to drugs (ototoxicity), but treatment is available.

Ménière's disease

A chronic, treatable vestibular disorder caused by abnormally large amounts of endolymph fluid collecting in the ear. Typically occurs in adults between 40 and 60 years of age and may eventually lead to hearing loss.

With proper diagnosis and therapeutic exercises, most balance issues can be managed.

For more information about hearing and balance, talk to your hearing healthcare professional