



The Balance System

We rely on 3 systems for balance:

1. The balance organs in the inner ears (the semicircular canals)
2. Vision
3. Sensors in the muscles and joints throughout the body.

When any part of the system is not working correctly it can result in dizziness and/or imbalance. Dizziness itself can vary from a sensation of light headedness, to a feeling of spinning which is called vertigo- nothing to do with a fear of heights!

There are few specific tests available, so diagnosis is largely based on your symptoms and how they behave.

Disorders of the inner ear usually give the most intense symptoms of vertigo. At its most severe it can be associated with nausea and vomiting and sweating. Many people are frightened by these sensations thinking they might be having a stroke or that they have a brain tumour.

The good news is that often a simple viral infection of the inner ear has caused the problem. This is known as vestibular neuritis.

Vestibular Neuritis

It is thought that the virus affects how the inner ear works by causing inflammation around the vestibular nerve.

The fine balance between the left and right ears is upset which confuses the brain, and the result is vertigo.

Over time the brain learns to compensate for the change, and the vertigo will gradually improve. In order for this to happen the brain has to experience movement and dizziness.

As soon as you can, you should try to move around. This can be difficult, because the natural reaction is to avoid the movements which make you feel dizzy. You could turn your head side to side slowly 2-3 times, or move it up and down. Move your eyes with your head, to focus on different objects. Gradually increase the speed and amount of movement.

Medication is useful in the first few days, but will hinder recovery if taken for longer. If your symptoms are not improving after 2-3 weeks your doctor can refer you to Dizzy/Vertigo clinic.

Benign Paroxysmal Positional Vertigo (BPPV)

Another common cause of vertigo is this condition in which tiny crystals become loose and move around in the fluid within the semicircular canals.

The vertigo in this situation lasts less than a minute, and usually occurs on lying down, rolling over in bed, looking upwards or downwards. The vertigo can be relieved by repositioning the crystals using an Epley Manoeuvre. This involves moving the head through certain positions to tip the crystals out of the canal and into the central chamber of the inner ear.

These are only two of the many conditions that can affect the balance system. Other less common causes are labyrinthitis, Meniere's disease, migraine, head injury, whiplash injury and neurological problems.

Vertigo Clinic

This is currently being run in the Physiotherapy Dept and ENT Dept at Torbay Hospital. You will be assessed by a specialist physiotherapist or specialist audiologist.

A detailed history of your problem will be taken, along with details of your past medical history and medication.

Your balance system will be examined in detail. This may involve looking at eye movement, your coordination and your ability to balance in various situations. You will usually be tested BPPV which involves lying flat, so let us know if this is a problem for you.

If appropriate you will be advised regarding specific exercises, or may be treated with an Epley Manoeuvre.

Please do not to drive to the appointment if at all possible.

Follow this link for more advice about exercises for vertigo:

<http://www.torbayandsouthdevon.nhs.uk/vertigo>

Torbay and South Devon 

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INFORMATION**

Dizziness/Vertigo