

Patient information on Dizziness (Vertigo)

Who is this information for?

This information is for patients, families and carers with a diagnosis of dizziness.

What is dizziness (vertigo)?

- Dizziness is a feeling that may be hard to describe, but often includes a feeling that you are spinning or tilting or that you are about to fall or pass out.
- Dizziness can also cause you to feel light-headed or to have difficulty walking straight.
- Many people who feel dizzy have **vertigo**, a specific type of dizziness.
- **Vertigo** causes a sense of spinning dizziness, swaying or tilting.
- You may feel that you are moving or that the room is moving around you.



What are the symptoms of dizziness?

- Symptoms include:
 - Spinning (you or the room around you)
 - Tilting or swaying
 - Feeling off-balance



- Along with dizziness you may:
 - Vomit or feel nauseous
 - Have a headache or be sensitive to light and noise
 - Have double vision, have trouble speaking or swallowing or feel weak
 - Feel short of breath or sweaty and have a racing heart beat

What are some of the common causes of dizziness?

- **Inner ear problems:** collections of calcium (*canaliths* in **BPPV**), inflammation and certain infections can cause problems in the vestibular (balance) system of the ear
- **Head injury:** can affect the vestibular system in a variety of ways and lead to dizziness
- **Medications:** rarely, some medications can damage the inner ear. Other medications can affect the function of the inner ear or brain and lead to dizziness. Some medications can cause sudden drops in blood pressure
- **Migraines:** some migraines can result in dizziness, even without a headache (**e.g. Vestibular Migraine**)
- **Brain problems:** some brain problems such as strokes or multiple sclerosis can cause dizziness, but these *rarely* cause dizziness alone, and you will have other symptoms such as weakness of a limb, slurred speech, or facial asymmetry.
- **Heart problems:** an abnormal heart rhythm or drop in blood pressure can result in feeling faint or light headed, due to a sudden decrease in blood to the brain.
- **Alcohol and drugs:** your balance can be affected by drinking too much or taking certain non-prescription drugs.

When should I seek help for my dizziness?

- You should consult a doctor for dizziness if you have one or more of the following additional symptoms:
 - Headache, especially if it is severe or a different kind of headache to the ones you usually get
 - Hearing or visual loss
 - Problem with speech
 - Weakness of the arms or legs
 - Difficulty walking
 - Collapse or periods of unconsciousness
 - Chest pain
 - An abnormal slow or fast pulse or irregular pulse
 - Any other symptoms that cannot be explained

What treatment is available for dizziness?

- Several treatment options are available and will depend on the cause of your dizziness.
- You may be prescribed Cawthorne-Cooksey balance exercises as a form of general vestibular (balance) rehabilitation, regardless of the underlying cause.

Who are Cawthorne-Cooksey exercises for?

- The purpose of Cawthorne-Cooksey exercises is to train the brain to compensate for the imbalance between the two ears. Frequent repetition of the exercises will usually lead to improvement in dizziness and balance.
- You shouldn't try to perform all the exercises at once. Rather, you should perform a group of exercises at a time, starting at the top of the list. You should concentrate on performing only the exercises that cause dizziness. When you can perform a section of exercises without feeling dizzy, you should move to the next group down the page.

What are the Cawthorne-Cooksey exercises?

- **Sitting**
 - a. Eye movements – at first slowly, then quickly:
 - Up and down
 - From side to side
 - Focus on finger with arm extended and slowly move finger towards face until vision starts to blur
 - b. Head movements – at first slowly, then quickly (later with eyes closed):
 - Bend forward and backward

- Turn from side to side
- c. Bend forward and pick up objects from the ground
- **Standing**
 - a. Follow steps 1 to 3 described above while standing
 - b. Change from sitting to standing position with eyes open and shut
 - c. Throw a small ball from hand to hand (above eye level)
 - d. Change from sitting to standing position and make a full turn in between
- **Moving about**
 - a. Circle around a centre person who will throw a ball back and forth
 - b. Walk across a room with eyes open and then closed
 - c. Walk up and down a slope with eyes open and then closed
 - d. Walk up and down steps with eyes open and then closed
 - e. Any game involving bending, stretching and aiming such as tennis, bowls or basketball

How do I keep safe while I have dizziness?

- You need to stop driving if you get sudden, unexpected and disabling attacks of dizziness
- You should inform your employer if dizziness could pose a risk to yourself or others in your job
- To avoid falls around the home, get out of bed slowly and avoid jobs around the house which make you dizzy

Concerns or questions?

You can contact your ENT Specialist at the Melbourne ENT Group (MEG):

- Phone: 1300-952-808
- Email: admin@melbentgroup.com.au
- Website: www.melbentgroup.com.au



Your GP is also the best contact for ongoing care and concerns.