

Patient Advisory

Dizziness and Vertigo

About Dizziness and Vertigo

Dizziness is a subjective sensation of feeling faint/ light headed/ weak or unsteady. You may be unable to maintain normal balance in a standing or seated position. Many people feel lightheaded if they get up too quickly from sitting or lying down.

Vertigo is the illusion of movement either of oneself or of the surroundings. You may experience the sensation of movement even when you are standing completely still. It can be caused by a wide range of benign and/or serious underlying conditions. If you have vertigo, apart from the above mentioned symptom, you will experience symptoms like loss of balance, nausea, vomiting, light headedness, difficulty standing, difficulty walking.

Common Causes for Dizziness and vertigo

Dizziness or vertigo may result from disorder of any of the main body parts involved in maintaining balance (such as eyes, ears or brain) or from certain drugs. Common causes include:

- Heat stroke
- Dehydration
- Pregnancy
- Heart disease
- Head injury
- A sudden drop in blood pressure on standing up
- Diabetes
- Disease of inner ear
- Motion sickness
- Vision problems
- Certain drugs (such as anticonvulsants and sedatives)

Diagnosis of the causes of Dizziness

Diagnosis of dizziness starts with a medical history and physical examination. This may be all that is needed to figure out the cause. In other cases, further tests may be needed. A doctor tries to identify what is causing the dizziness and whether the dizziness fits into specific category, such as vertigo.

If your doctor suspects vertigo, he might ask you to perform certain maneuver (such as breathing out vigorously against a closed mouth as if straining at stool) or tests that may provoke the symptoms.

For patients suspected with Benign Paroxysmal Positional Vertigo:

If your doctor suspects you to have Benign Paroxysmal Positional Vertigo (BPPV), he will perform a special test called hallpike's maneuver that provokes the symptoms of vertigo.

This test involves moving quickly from a sitting to lying position, with your head below the horizontal line (of the surface you are lying on).As you lie back, you will be asked to rotate your head towards the person testing you, keeping your eyes open.

In cases of BPPV, after about 10 seconds, the symptoms of vertigo appear for several seconds, without disappearing.

When to contact a Doctor

If you have recurrent / persistent vertigo or if it interferes with your daily activities, you should see your doctor. He will be able to confirm or rule out a more serious cause, and recommend appropriate treatment. Call your doctor if your dizziness is accompanied by:

- A new, different or severe headache
- Falling or trouble walking
- Hearing loss

Call your doctor immediately if the following warning signs appear:

- Fits
- Chest pain
- Shortness of breath
- Sensational heartbeats
- Leg or arm weakness
- Changes in your vision or speech
- Loss of consciousness that lasts more than just a few minutes

You should seek help immediately if you have had a stroke in the past or have risk factors for stroke such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and smoking.

Medical Treatment for Dizziness:

The treatment of dizziness depends on the underlying conditions. Your Doctor may give you any of these medications to relieve your symptoms. Make sure you understand from the Doctor or Nurse what these are or if you need to take any precautions with them.

Antibiotics may be prescribed in rare cases where there may be bacterial infection of the inner ear.

Surgery may be a rare option in very severe cases where symptoms persist for years and when all other treatment has failed.

Class of medicine	Objective	Examples
Anti-histamines	To relieve dizziness	Mecizine
Benzodiazepine	To relieve dizziness	Diazepam
Anti-cholinergics	To relieve dizziness/travel sickness	Scopolamine
Phenothiazine	Nausea & vomiting	Promethazine
Phenothiazine	Nausea & vomiting	Prochlorperazine

Precautions with your medication:

Most of these medicines make you sleepy, and you should not take them before you work or drive. You should take them to treat severe vertigo symptoms, and you should stop the medicine when your symptoms improve.

Some medicines need to be taken with food while others may require specific precautions. Speak to your Doctor or Nurse to understand any precautions needed with medication.

Your doctor would warn you against the side effects of some of the medicines for dizziness and vertigo. Side effects of some of the drugs are listed below:

- Mecizine may cause drowsiness, thickening of bronchial secretions, dry mouth, fatigue, blurred vision.
- Diazepam may cause psychological and GI disturbances, changes in salivation, physical dependence with withdrawal syndrome, fatigue, drowsiness, sedation.
- Glycopyrrolate may cause dry mouth, constipation, bloating
- Scopolamine may cause fatigue, headache, memory loss, dry skin, erythema
- Promethazine may cause dryness of mouth, blurring of vision, retention of urine, constipation
- Prochlorperazine may cause dry mouth, blurring of vision, constipation.

Special precautions for patients on treatment for Benign Paroxysmal Positional Vertigo

BPPV is a self-limiting disorder i.e. symptoms often subside or disappear within two months of onset. Sometimes, your doctor may perform a simple procedure called Epley maneuver. This is done by a series of four movements of the head. After each movement, the head is held in the same place for 30 seconds or so.

Precautions for patients after Epley maneuver:

- Do not lie flat for 48 hours. During this time sleep sitting in a chair.
- Do not lie on the affected side for one week.
- Ideally, try to avoid bending over (such as to tie shoelaces) for a week.

- Don't turn your head far up or far down.
- Be careful to avoid head-extended position, in which you are lying on your back, especially with your head turned towards the affected side.
- Exercises for low-back pain should be stopped for a week. No "sit-ups" should be done for at least one week
- At one week after treatment, put yourself in the position that usually makes you dizzy. Position yourself cautiously and under conditions in which you can't fall or hurt yourself. Let your doctor know how you did.

Care & Prevention

Home treatment for dizziness & vertigo:

- Drink plenty of water, have regular meals, and adequate rest. This will improve the low blood pressure resulting from dehydration.
- Avoid sudden leaping out of bed in the morning. Remain sitting up for a minute or two before standing.
- Make your home safe if you have chronic dizziness. A walker or a stick is a safety measure that may help to avoid injury. Also, keep items at levels within your reach and avoid bending your neck back.
- If you have vertigo, do not lie flat on your back. Prop yourself up slightly to relieve the spinning sensation
- Keep yourself away from stress situations and also do yoga or exercises and meditation to reduce stress. Stress and anxiety can make the symptoms of vertigo worse.
- Move slowly to avoid the risk of falling.
- Avoid movements that, for you, trigger dizziness, such as looking up or looking down.
- Learn exercises of eyes, head and body movements that help prevent dizziness.

Monitoring your condition

Your Doctor would have set up a follow-up visit for you. In the meantime it would help the clinic if you monitor your symptoms like:

- Are there any particular triggers that worsen your symptoms at home or work?
- Is it worsening at any particular time during day / night? Also what improves it?
- Monitor any weakness in arms or legs or any breathlessness episodes. (if you note any then visit the clinic)
- Monitor timings and triggers for headaches if any.
- Monitor any side effects or allergies after starting treatment. Report any reactions or allergies to your doctor

At your next visit take any previous records or medications that you may have been taking. Such information will help your Doctor understand your condition better. If the cause of dizziness is the drug, then your doctor might ask you to stop the drug or reduce the dosage.

Caution Notice

This information is not a substitute for a Doctor's advice. Only your Doctor can weigh all the diverse aspects of your condition and choose the treatment most likely to meet your needs.