

Vertigo

Vertigo feels like you or everything around you is spinning. It's more than feeling dizzy, it affects your balance.

A vertigo attack can last from a few seconds to hours. If you have severe vertigo, it can last for many days or months.

Vertigo often gets better without treatment. Contact your GP if it keeps coming back or it affects your daily life.

Easing vertigo

You can do things to ease vertigo and reduce how often it happens.

Do

- ✓ lie still in a quiet, dark room to reduce the spinning feeling
- ✓ move your head carefully and slowly when you do your usual daily activities
- ✓ sit down straight away when you feel dizzy
- ✓ turn on the lights if you get up at night
- ✓ use a walking stick if you're at risk of falling
- ✓ sleep with your head slightly raised on 2 or more pillows
- ✓ get out of bed slowly and sit on the edge of the bed for a while before standing up
- ✓ try to relax, anxiety can make vertigo worse

Don't

- ✗ do not bend over to pick things up - squat to lower yourself instead
- ✗ do not stretch your neck - for example, when you reach up to a high shelf

What happens at your appointment

Your GP will ask about your symptoms to try to find out what type of vertigo you have.

They may do a test to check your balance. They'll ask you to move quickly from a sitting position to a lying position. This could bring on symptoms.

If you need more tests, they may refer you to a specialist.

Ask for an urgent GP appointment if:

you have vertigo that does not go away or keeps coming back and you:

- have a severe headache
- feel very sick or you are vomiting
- have a high temperature of 38 degrees Celsius or above
- feel hot and shivery

Call 112 or 999 or go to your nearest emergency department (ED) if

you or someone else has vertigo and:

- double vision or loss of vision
- hearing loss
- trouble speaking
- leg or arm weakness, numbness or tingling
- cannot wake up

Treating vertigo

The treatment for vertigo depends on the cause. It often settles without treatment.

Your GP may prescribe:

- antihistamines
- anti-sickness medicine
- antibiotics - if the cause is an infection

They may also do exercises with you or show you exercises to do at home.

If you drive, you must tell the National Driver Licence Service (NDLS) about your vertigo.

[Informing the NDLS about a medical condition - ndls.ie](https://www.ndls.ie)

Causes of vertigo

The most common causes of vertigo are inner ear problems that affect your balance.

These include:

- benign paroxysmal positional vertigo (BPPV) - where specific head movements cause vertigo
- labyrinthitis - an inner ear infection caused by a cold or flu virus
- vestibular neuronitis - inflammation of the vestibular nerve (the nerve in the inner ear that sends messages to the brain)
- Ménière's disease - a rare inner ear condition that can cause hearing loss or [tinnitus \(ringing in the ear\)](#)

Other causes of vertigo include:

- migraine
- some types of medicine - check the patient information leaflet of any medicines you take
- hormone changes - such as around [menopause](#)

Sometimes the cause is unknown.

Content supplied by the [NHS](#) and adapted for Ireland by the HSE

Sláintecare.

HSE Live - we're here to help

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