

## Do you need help?

If you experience dizziness or vertigo, you could be at risk for a fall and should seek help. Tests can be done to tell which part of the balance system is having difficulty. The information from these tests can be used to treat the balance problem.

## What should you do?

You should consult with your doctor or audiologist for more information. Before making an appointment for a dizziness or balance problem, make a note of your symptoms. Some questions to ask yourself are:



- √ Do you feel worse when you turn your head in a certain direction?
- √ Do you feel like you are turning or spinning?
- √ Do you feel **better** or **worse** when you lie down?
- √ How long do your symptoms last?
- √ How often do your symptoms occur?
- √ Do you have hearing loss, ringing or pain in your ears?

**Your treatment will depend on the cause, but help is available for you.**

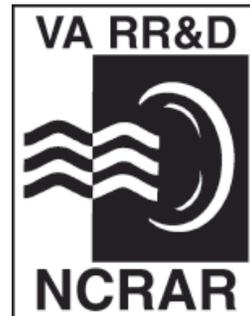
### Other resources:

Vestibular Disorders Association:  
<http://www.vestibular.org>

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association:  
<http://www.asha.org/public/>

The American Institute of Balance:  
<http://dizzy.com>

Chicago Dizziness and Hearing:  
<http://www.dizziness-and-balance.com>

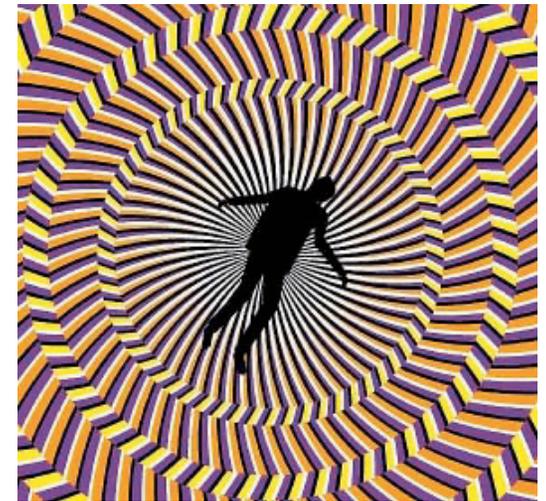


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# Dizziness and Balance

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## Balance is like our sixth sense

Although we don't often think about it, our sense of balance is extremely important for doing even the simplest of tasks.

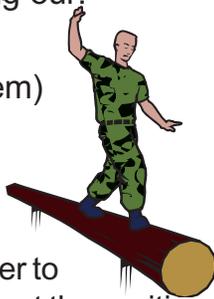


- Balance is similar to a sixth sense because when it is functioning properly, we may not notice it is helping us with just about everything we do.
- Our balance system allows us to notice when we are moving up or down in an elevator, driving forward in a car, or even just walking or standing.
- Balance problems can make ordinary tasks more difficult and take longer.
- Balance problems can affect our ability to concentrate, and tire us more easily.
- Balance disorders increase the chances of falling and injury.

## How do we keep our balance?

We keep our balance using our:

- **Eyes** (visual system)
- **Ears** (vestibular system)
- **Muscles and joints** (somatosensory system)



These systems work together to send signals to the brain about the position and movement of our body. Our brain then sends signals back to our body telling it how to make adjustments. Problems with any of these systems can affect our balance.

## What do ears have to do with balance?

The part of our ear that deals with balance is called the **vestibular system**. This system sends signals to the brain about our head positions and movements.

Some facts about the vestibular system:

- ✓ It is in the innermost part of our ear.
- ✓ It is made up of 3 structures that are filled with fluid, called the semi-circular canals. The fluid in these structures moves when we move our head. This fluid motion is how our ears communicate head movements to our brain.
- ✓ Our ears communicate with our eyes and tell them how to move based on how we move our head.
- ✓ There are also 2 organs made up of a jelly-like substance, which sense motions of up and down, and forward and back. When we move, these structures momentarily lag behind, and this slight lag tells the brain how we are moving.

Our vestibular system helps us to stay upright and in control of our posture. By sensing our head movements, our vestibular system is constantly providing information to the rest of the body about how to maintain a good center of gravity and avoid falling over.



## What can go wrong?

Our balance system can be damaged in several ways, and this can cause many different symptoms. These symptoms are usually described as dizziness or vertigo.



**Dizziness.** Dizziness is a common complaint. It is also an invisible symptom because no one can look at you and tell that you are dizzy. Dizziness is often described as a feeling of being off-balance, light-headed or unsteady. However, symptoms may be difficult to describe.

**Vertigo.** Vertigo is a specific symptom that means that you feel like you are moving, turning or spinning, when you are not. You might also feel like the environment around you is moving. Symptoms of vertigo are often due to a vestibular disorder.

- Symptoms of vertigo can get worse when you move your head.
- Symptoms can begin suddenly and without warning.
- The spinning sensation can lead to nausea and a loss of balance.
- Symptoms may be brief or may last for a long time.

Since our balance and hearing systems involve the inner ear, sometimes balance problems can occur along with hearing loss or tinnitus (ringing in the ear).