

## Do you need help?

If you experience dizziness or vertigo, you could be at risk for a fall and should seek help. There are tests which can tell which part of your 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

[www.vestibular.org](http://www.vestibular.org)

### American Speech-Language-Hearing Association

[www.asha.org/public/](http://www.asha.org/public/)

### The American Institute of Balance

[www.dizzy.com](http://www.dizzy.com)

### Chicago Dizziness and Hearing

[www.dizziness-and-balance.com/](http://www.dizziness-and-balance.com/)

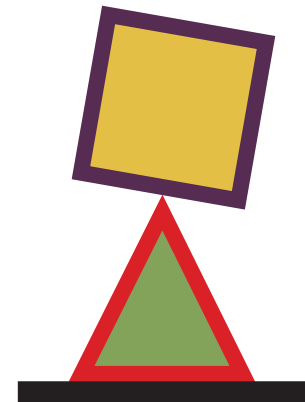
National Center for  
Rehabilitative Auditory Research (NCRAR)  
VA Portland Health Care System  
3710 SW US Veterans Hospital Road  
Portland, Oregon 97239  
503-220-8262, ext. 54525  
[www.ncrar.research.va.gov](http://www.ncrar.research.va.gov)

648PFEM1107 June 2018



# Dizziness and Balance

Sean Kampel, AuD &  
Gabrielle Saunders, PhD



National Center for Rehabilitative  
Auditory Research (NCRAR)

VA Portland Health Care System,  
Portland, OR



VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Veterans Health Administration  
VA Portland Health Care System

## 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. It affects just about everything we do. It tells us whether we are moving forwards or backwards, up or down, or are just staying still. It also helps us to stay upright and in control of our posture.

### Balance problems

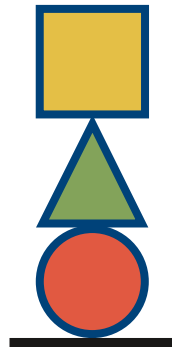
- Can make ordinary tasks very difficult
- Can affect our ability to concentrate and make us tired
- Increase the chances of falling or tripping over

## 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 what adjustment to make. Problems with any of these systems can affect our balance.

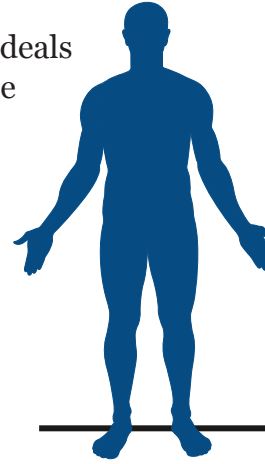


## What do ears have to do with balance?

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

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. Information about the motion of this fluid is what communicates head movements to our brain. Our eyes use this information to account for our head movement.
- There are also 2 organs made up of a jelly-like substance, which sense up and down, and forward and backward movement.
- 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 happens when the balance system goes wrong?

If our balance system is damaged, it can cause many different symptoms. These symptoms are usually described as dizziness or vertigo.

### Dizziness

Dizziness is a common complaint of people with balance disorders. It is often described as a feeling of being off-balance, light-headed or unsteady.

### Vertigo

Vertigo is a specific symptom that means that you feel like you are moving, turning or spinning, when you are not, or it might seem as though the world around you is moving and that you are still. 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).