

Vestibular Physiotherapy

Treatment for patients with vertigo, dizziness and balance problems

Read this pamphlet to learn about:

- How your vestibular system works
- What vestibular physiotherapy is
- How to make an appointment
- Who to contact



Balance and vestibular problems

Your balance is controlled by 3 systems in your body:

1. Vestibular system (inner ear)
2. Vision
3. Information from your feet, muscles and joints about your body's position (proprioception)

The vestibular system has parts of the inner ear and brain that control balance and eye movements.

The vestibular system does 2 main things:

- It allows your eyes to stay focused when your head is moving.
- It keeps you from falling over by sending signals to the muscles in your body that control balance.

When the vestibular organs are affected by disease or injury, the brain cannot get the correct information from them about balance and motion.

This usually causes symptoms such as:

- dizziness
- vertigo (feeling like you are spinning or moving even though you are not)
- imbalance
- blurred or bouncy vision

After inner ear problems, many people are easily bothered when they see motion in their environment such as with traffic or with crowded places like grocery stores or malls. They are also easily bothered by head and body movements.

What is vestibular physiotherapy?

The vestibular physiotherapy program offers education and exercise programs created just for you. These exercises help the brain learn how to compensate for the loss of inner ear function. If you have Benign paroxysmal positional vertigo (BPPV), we can do repositioning maneuvers that can quickly improve your symptoms.

The vestibular physiotherapy program at UHN offers treatments for many conditions that cause imbalance and dizziness.

Those problems could be:

- a virus affecting the inner ear
- trauma
- aging
- medicines affecting the ear (ototoxicity)
- Meniere's disease
- some central nervous system causes of vertigo

Vestibular physiotherapy can help to lower or even stop symptoms.

Vestibular physiotherapy helps to:

- ✓ improve dizziness
- ✓ improve balance function
- ✓ improve visual focus (gaze stability)
- ✓ lower sensitivity to motion
- ✓ raise confidence and activity levels
- ✓ help you return to your daily activities

What to expect at the appointments

Your vestibular physiotherapy initial assessment lasts 90 minutes.

During the assessment, the physiotherapist takes a detailed history to get a better understanding of your symptoms and how they affect your daily life. The physical examination looks closely at your inner ear, vision, balance and walking.

Once the vestibular physiotherapist completes the assessment, they create a home exercise program made especially for you, based on your symptoms and your goals. You will continue to do the exercises at home.

Sometimes you need to come in for follow-up appointments so that we can see how you are doing and change your program, if needed. You also do balance exercises during the appointments.

Follow-up appointments are 40 minutes long.

How many times do I need to see my physiotherapist?

Patients with some conditions such as BPPV may only need 1 or 2 visits. Other conditions may require you to meet the physiotherapist about 5 to 6 times over 3 to 4 months. Your physiotherapist will give you more information after your first appointment.

How do I make an appointment?

We recommend that your family doctor or specialist refer you to our program or you can also self-refer.

Your family doctor can fax the referral to 416 697 0730 and then you can call us at 416 697 1002 to schedule your appointment.

We can usually schedule you to come in within a few weeks.

Is there a cost?

There is a fee for vestibular physiotherapy. It is not covered by OHIP.

Please check your extended health insurance plan to see if you are covered.

Who to contact

Shaleen Sulway or Elizabeth Crawford, Certified Vestibular Physiotherapists
Vestibular Health
Hertz Clinic for Meniere's Disease and Vestibular Dysfunction
Toronto General Hospital
Phone: 416 697 1002

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