



Dizziness/Vertigo

Vertigo is a specific spinning sensation; an illusion of motion. Dizziness is an uncomfortable inner feeling of confusion. Lightheadedness is what you feel when you get up too fast, as if not enough blood is getting to your brain. A certain amount of transient lightheadedness is normal but not if it is persistent. Any medication that affects blood pressure regulation (antihypertensives, diuretics and antidepressants) can cause lightheadedness.

What are some conditions related to vertigo and/or dizziness and subsequent imbalance?

- **BPPV** - Benign Paroxysmal Positional Vertigo – this is a brief sensation of vertigo that occurs as a result of quick changes in head/body movement (e.g. rolling over in bed, standing up too fast, tilting the head back). Dislodged tiny calcium carbonate crystals called otoliths become dislodged and float into the semicircular canals of the inner ear causing symptoms of severe episodic vertigo. The exact cause of BPPV is not known, although it can be caused by an inner ear infection, head injury or aging.
- **Viral Labyrinthitis** – an infection or inflammation of the inner ear causing dizziness, loss of balance and sometimes sudden loss of hearing. This condition usually resolves in about six weeks.
- **Meniere's Disease** – an inner ear fluid balance disorder that causes episodes of vertigo, fluctuating hearing loss, tinnitus (ringing or roaring sound in the ears), and the sensation of fullness in the ear.
- **Vestibular Neuronitis** – an infection of the vestibular nerve, generally viral.
- **Perilymph Fistula** – a leakage of inner ear fluid to the middle ear. It can occur after head injury, physical exertion or rarely, without cause.
- **Vestibular Migraines** – dizziness can be a symptom of migraine. Migraine is a blood vessel disease characterized by periodic, usually one-sided headaches. These headaches are often preceded for a variable time by associated neurological symptoms, called the *aura*. Dizziness and vertigo can occur in individuals with migraine as part of the migraine aura or separately. Dizziness may not occur at the same time as the headache and can even occur as an isolated event.
- **Inner Ear trauma** – trauma to the inner ear can occur from penetrating injuries, blunt skull trauma with skull base fracture, concussion damage to the inner ear and sound or pressure trauma (barotrauma). The ear trauma itself can cause balance symptoms. In addition, the head trauma can dislodge small crystals floating within the inner ear and cause BPPV.
- **Medication damage to the inner ear (ototoxicity)** – ototoxicity refers to the damage caused to the inner ear (labyrinth) from the use of various

medications. These medications can damage the balance (vestibular) system or hearing (auditory) system or both.

- ***Acoustic Neuromas*** – an acoustic neuroma is a very rare, benign growth of insulating cells on the VIII nerve; the nerve responsible for hearing and balance. The main initial symptoms of an acoustic neuroma are usually related to impaired balance. Over time, the growth compresses and damages the cochlear (hearing) portion of the VIII nerve resulting in impaired hearing. Acoustic neuromas are slow growing.
- ***Multiple Sclerosis (MS)*** – MS is a demyelinating (loss of nerve cell insulation) brain disorder of unknown cause. Although dizziness or vertigo is not often the only indication of multiple sclerosis, it is a common symptom that occurs at some point in the illness. Vertigo is the initial symptom in 5% of patients but is reported at some time during the course of the disease by as many as 50%. Hearing loss occurs in about 10% of patients.
- ***Disequilibrium of Aging*** – as individuals age, there is a general decrease in vestibular function. This decrease is accompanied by a general decrease in vision, position sense (proprioception), muscle and bone strength, and brain function. All of these changes combined often lead to a slowly progressive feeling of imbalance (disequilibrium). A general physical examination is important to rule out other serious conditions that can cause balance problems.

If you are experiencing vertigo, dizziness or lightheadedness, seek medical attention. Your primary care physician may refer you to an ENT (Ear, Nose, Throat) specialist or otolaryngologist for further evaluation. There are several tests that can be performed right here at Mid-Hudson Medical Group to help in the diagnosis of your particular disorder.