

What is vertigo?

Vertigo is a type of dizziness. It is described as a 'spinning' sensation in the head and is usually brought on by sudden changes in position.

Some people say it feels like standing still in a spinning room. You may feel like you are going to fall over.

While there are some serious causes of vertigo, in most cases it is not a serious condition and usually gets better with time.

What causes vertigo?

The most common cause of vertigo is called *benign positional paroxysmal vertigo* or BPPV.

BPPV happens when tiny particles in the balance centre of the inner ear are disturbed, usually by sudden movement. This causes the spinning sensation.

It is a common problem that can affect people of all ages.

Activities that bring on a dizzy spell can vary. They often involve moving your head into a certain position suddenly, such as:

- looking up
- lying on one ear
- rolling over in bed
- getting out of bed
- bending over.

There are other causes of vertigo, including head injuries (such as a knock to the head), stroke, circulation problems, infections, inner ear disorders, and the degeneration of inner ear structures. For some people the cause may not be found.

What are the symptoms?

- Dizziness – this begins seconds after a certain head movement and lasts less than a minute.
- Feeling light-headed.
- Balance problems.
- Nausea – feeling like you are going to vomit.

These symptoms usually get better once you are in a different position.

Pain, ringing in the ears (*tinnitus*) or deafness is not common.

If you have more serious symptoms – speech difficulty, double vision, unsteady walking, difficulty swallowing, altered strength or feeling in your legs or arms, ringing in your ears or deafness – you should seek medical help.

Treatment

Vertigo often gets better by itself. Many people improve without treatment.

If BPPV is an ongoing problem then your doctor may offer options.

- **Medication** – motion sickness medication can sometimes help with nausea. It will not prevent vertigo attacks. Follow the instructions on the packet.
- **Special exercises** – you may be advised to perform *Brandt-Daroff exercises* (see over the page).

You may be referred to a specialist doctor for further treatment or to rule out other rare causes for your dizziness.

Home care

Your doctor or health care professional will advise you on what to do to help with BPPV.

Here are some things you can do at home.

- Avoid head positions that provoke an attack.
- Do the *Brandt-Daroff exercises*, as instructed.
- Avoid sleeping on the affected or 'bad' side.
- Elevate (raise) your head on two pillows when resting.
- In the morning get up slowly and sit on the edge of the bed for a minute.
- Take prescribed medications as directed.
- **Do not drive until your symptoms have completely resolved.**

What to expect

The attacks usually come in bursts. If the exercises are done regularly, the symptoms should settle over the next 10 days, although it can take longer. Most people return to work or normal activities within a week.

About one in three people will have a new attack within a year. While these attacks can cause discomfort there is usually no long-term damage. Some people may have ongoing problems with balance and surgery may be needed.

Some people only ever have one attack.

Return to the emergency department if you develop:

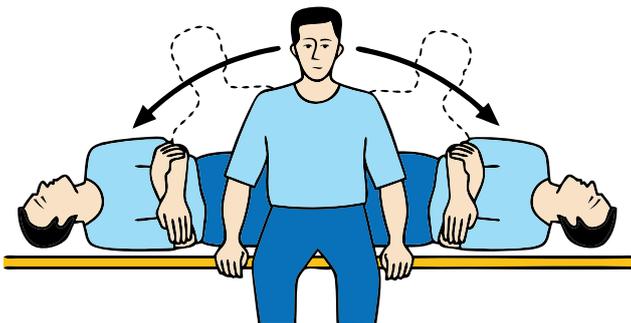
- speech or swallowing difficulties
- facial, arm or leg weakness or numbness.

Brandt-Daroff exercises

The *Brandt-Daroff* exercises are thought to disperse any tiny particles away from the balance centre in your ear, therefore getting rid of the cause of your dizziness.

You may be anxious that the exercises will bring back your symptoms. This is normal. However, **the exercises will only work if you feel dizzy as you do them**. The dizziness will get less with time.

1. Sit on the edge of the bed. Turn your head 45 degrees (look to the left). Lie down quickly on the right side. Ensure the back of the head rests on the bed. Wait 20–30 seconds or until the dizziness stops.
2. Sit upright. Wait 20–30 seconds for any dizziness to settle.
3. Repeat on the other side. Turn the head slightly to the right before lying down quickly on the left side.
4. Do five times on each side (takes about 10 minutes). Repeat three times a day.



Notes:

Seeking help



In a **medical emergency** go to the nearest hospital emergency department or call an ambulance (dial 000).



For other medical problems see your local doctor or health care professional.



For health advice from a Registered Nurse you can call **NURSE-ON-CALL 24 hours a day** on **1300 60 60 24** for the cost of a local call from anywhere in Victoria.*

NURSE-ON-CALL provides access to **interpreting services** for callers not confident with English. Call **1300 60 60 24**.

*Calls from mobile calls may be charged at a higher rate



Want to know more?

- Ask your local doctor or health care professional.
- Visit the **Better Health Channel** www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

If you would like to receive this publication in an **accessible format**, please phone 9096 0578 or email edfactsheets@health.vic.gov.au



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