

Darn Dizziness Disorders **by Ryan Sleik**

Did you know that dizziness is one of the more common reasons a person attends the emergency department? Dizziness is a common problem that can occur due to a number of factors. Medications, illness or health conditions can lead to different types of dizziness. If you have unusual symptoms that accompany dizziness, such as weakness, shortness of breath, or chest pain, you should seek medical attention. However, dizziness or vertigo can often be the result of disorders of the inner ear. The inner ear, known as the vestibular system, is one of our body's sensory systems that tell us where we need to go. Some might think of the inner ear as the mother in law of balance, when it is unhappy you don't really want to be around! It is no surprise that when problems occur with the vestibular system we sometimes prefer to be on our backs rather than up and about.

The most common disorder of the vestibular system is given not quite so common name: Benign Paroxysmal Positional Vertigo, more simply known as BPPV. The cardinal symptom for this condition is vertigo (sensation of your body or the world spinning around you) that lasts less than one minute. The vertigo must be the result of changing the position of your head such as lying down or getting up in bed. These symptoms are the result of small particles falling in the tubes of the inner ear. When the particles fall with gravity your brain thinks you are spinning when you are actually still. The solution does not need medication. All that is needed is to put the crystals back where they belong and to find someone who knows how to do that. Fortunately physiotherapists are trained in this procedure (known as the Epley Maneuver) and can typically solve the problem in one or two treatments.

The second most common disorder of the vestibular system is the result of an infection of the inner ear (labyrinthitis or neuritis). Infections of the inner ear lead to sensations of fullness and/or ringing in the ear as well as feelings of being off balance. Often these symptoms can progress to very intense dizziness that remains even when you are not moving. Under these circumstances you should consult your family physician for a consultation and the prescription of the appropriate medications that will help reduce your symptoms. Usually after the intense symptoms resolve people are left with a feeling of being off balance and frequently report poor balance, mild to moderate dizziness, and difficulty focusing on objects. Specific exercises can be provided to you by a physiotherapist to help you learn how to improve your balance and reduce or eliminate your dizzy symptoms. After performing the appropriate exercises for a few weeks you will be ready to shake things up without a worry!