

Aging and Dizziness

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Patient Fact Sheet

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What is the impact of aging on balance and dizziness?

Dizziness and balance problems are common in older adults. Over the age of 65, dizziness becomes one of the most common reasons for doctors' office visits and hospitalizations. Some people describe dizziness as a spinning sensation or "vertigo". Others describe dizziness as a general feeling of unsteadiness, rocking sensation as if on a boat, and or as "lightheadedness". Regardless of how dizziness is described, it can result in difficulty walking, nausea, anxiety, feelings of being tired, decreased ability to concentrate and even depression. Above all, it can increase the risk for falls, which is a serious health concern among older adults.

What causes dizziness and/or imbalance?

Although there are natural physical changes that occur as we age, dizziness and falls are not "just part of getting older."

We use 3 systems to keep our balance: vision, sensation, and the inner ear. This information is then processed in the brain.

A few things can affect these systems and cause imbalance and dizziness.

Factors that may increase the risk of falling:

- Leg strength
- Dizziness
- Vision
- Thinking skills (Cognition)
- A drop in blood pressure when going from sitting to stand or lying down to sitting up (orthostatic hypotension)
- Certain medications or combinations of medication

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How can physical therapists help people who have dizziness and falls?

Physical therapists (PTs) are trained to assess balance and help determine your risk for falls. Often there is more than one reason for dizziness and falls. Once the cause(s) are identified, the PT can make a treatment plan specific to your balance problems to help meet your goals. Treatments may include maneuvers to fix loose crystals in the ear, specific balance and walking exercises, strengthening exercises, and education on home safety. Fear of falling and lack of movement actually increase the risk of a fall. Therefore, it can be helpful to work with a physical therapist to help you move and exercise safely. Specialized physical therapy such as vestibular rehabilitation has been found to be extremely effective in treating older adults with inner ear disorders and is highly recommended.

Use the link below to find more information and providers that treat people with dizziness and falls.

Link: [Map of Physical Therapists who Specialize in Vestibular Rehabilitation](#)

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