

Symptoms with Exercise

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Patient Fact Sheet

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Limiting Movement: A Common Mistake

If you have dizziness you may notice you are limiting movement of your head or body to make the dizziness better.

- You may have stopped going to places that are crowded, have poor lighting or have busy patterns on the floor or walls.
- You may be less active than usual or feel off balance.
- You may not be challenging yourself by doing your normal activities in the home, community, or outdoors.

However, in order for your dizziness to get better, it is important to resume the movements or activities that you have been avoiding. Consult a vestibular therapist to help decrease your dizziness and improve upon your balance with exercise. A vestibular therapist is a physical therapist who has special training in dizziness and imbalance.

Exercises for Dizziness

Your vestibular therapist will provide exercises to help improve your balance and dizziness. They may recommend stabilization of gaze exercises and/or habituation exercises to help you improve.

Stabilization of gaze exercises help you feel less dizzy and see more clearly when your head is moving.

- These exercises involve moving your head while keeping your eyes focused on a target.
- For the exercise to work, you must move your head as fast as you can without the target moving, blurring or doubling.
- It is normal for you to get a little dizzy or miss the target every now and then. Slow your head turns if this happens.
- Your vestibular therapist will help determine the amount and speed of exercise you need.

Symptoms with Exercise

Habituation exercises help your brain get used to movements or situations that make you feel dizzy.

- You only need to perform a few repetitions at a time.
- It is very important that you take breaks and allow your symptoms to go back to the level they were before starting another movement.
- Your vestibular therapist will help determine the movements and amount of repetition needed.

Should these exercises make me feel dizzy?

The exercises should cause a mild to moderate increase in dizziness for a short period of time. This slight increase in symptoms is what helps the brain make permanent changes to decrease dizziness in the long-term.

If you do the exercises and you feel no increase in dizziness, then you might be able to make the exercise a little harder or you may not need to perform them anymore.

Tell your vestibular therapist if:

- You become nauseated or develop a headache during the exercises.
- Your symptoms do not decrease back to the level the symptoms were before activity within 15-20 minutes.

Your vestibular therapist will change your exercises to help you tolerate them better. Also, if you feel off balance after doing an exercise, sit down and rest so that you do not fall.

When will I see improvement?

It is important to do your exercises as prescribed and go to all of your therapy sessions. This will let the physical therapist monitor your progress and make changes to your exercises as needed. You should begin to notice less dizziness with your exercises and daily activities within 2-4 weeks. However, it may take longer depending on the cause and the severity of your symptoms. If you feel your dizziness is getting worse or not changing, you may need to speak to your physician and your vestibular therapist for further medical management.

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