

Understanding Vestibular Conditions and Rehabilitation in Children

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Patient Fact Sheet

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What is the Vestibular System?

The vestibular system is a small but important part of the inner ear. It helps your child's brain understand how their head is moving and where their body is in space. This system plays a big role in:

- Keeping balance
- Seeing clearly while moving
- Feeling steady and upright

If the vestibular system isn't working well, your child might have trouble with balance, blurry vision when moving, or feel dizzy or sensitive to motion.

What Can Cause Vestibular Problems in Children?

Several conditions can affect the vestibular system in kids, including:

- **Hearing loss:** The hearing and balance systems are closely connected, so children born with severe hearing loss may also have balance issues.
- **Childhood migraines**
- **Infection present at birth**, like cytomegalovirus (cCMV)
- **Concussions or head injuries**
- **Middle ear infections:** These can cause temporary balance problems, which often improve after ear tubes are placed.

How Do I Know If My Child Has a Vestibular Problem?

You might notice signs like:

- Trouble balancing, especially during activities like riding a bike or walking on a line
- Delays in sitting, standing, or walking (in babies)
- Falling more often than other kids
- Difficulty focusing their eyes while moving (like during reading or sports)
- Complaints of dizziness or spinning, especially after a head injury or cochlear implant surgery
- Symptoms during migraines, such as dizziness that feels like the room is spinning (vertigo), ringing in the ears, or trouble speaking

Some children may not complain, but their behavior or motor skills might show something is off.

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How Can a Physical Therapist Help?

A pediatric physical therapist (PT) can:

- Check your child's balance and gross motor skills
- Do simple tests to see if the vestibular system might be involved
- Refer you to a doctor or audiologist if more testing is needed

If your child has balance or movement problems, the PT will create a fun, daily exercise plan to help improve:

- Balance
- Coordination
- Clear vision while moving
- Symptoms of dizziness or motion sensitivity

These exercises are most effective when done regularly for at least 12 weeks and incorporated into your child's daily life activities.

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