

Aging and Dizziness

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Fact Sheet

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What is the impact of aging on balance and dizziness?

Dizziness and balance disorders are a frequent problem, especially in older adults. Over the age of 65, the problem of dizziness becomes one of the most common reasons for doctors' office visits and hospitalizations. Some 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 Can be done to help 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 primary systems to keep our balance: vision, sensation, and inner ear. A number of factors can affect these systems, resulting in unsteadiness, dizziness, blurriness and even nausea. It is important to have regular eye exams and appointments with your physician to check medications as well as other possible sources of dizziness or imbalance. If there is an inner ear disorder, you may be appropriate for a special kind of physical therapy called "vestibular therapy."

What can a PT do for people who have dizziness and falls?

Physical therapists are trained to assess the multiple components of balance and determine whether you are at risk for falling. A vestibular physical therapist has specialized training to examine how your inner ear and brain are processing balance and to help determine the cause(s) of your dizziness and/or unsteadiness. Most often there is more than one reason for dizziness and falls, which is considered "multi-factorial." Once the cause(s) are identified, the therapist can tailor a treatment plan to meet your goals and address your specific needs. It is important to recognize that 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 safely move around in your environment and decrease your risk of falls. The good news is that many dizziness and balance disorders can be successfully treated with assistance from your doctor and therapist.

Where can I find more information and providers that treat people with dizziness and falls?

Additional information and provider searches may be found on the web sites: <http://www.neuropt.org> and www.vestibular.org

References

Yardley L, Owen N, Nazareth I and Luxon L. Prevalence and presentation of dizziness in a general practice community sample of working age people. Br J Gen Pract. 1998 Apr; 38(429):1131-1135.

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